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3 devotees drown in Nanjangud's Kapila river

MYSURU, 19 JAN

Three Ayyappa Swamy devotees drowned in Kapila river when they entered the waters early on Friday for a bath. The victims are Gavi Ranga, 19; Rakesh, 19, and Appu, 16, from Tumakuru. The victims were returning from Sabarimala, the shrine of Sri Ayyappa Swamy in Kerala. The group along with two other people visited Srikanteshwara Temple in Nanjangud and decided to bathe in the river before visiting the temple. However, the trio was in the swirling waters of Kapila river near the Hejjige bridge and drowned. The remaining two managed to reach the river bank safely. As of now, only one body has been recovered. ***—Salar News***

HC extends protection from arrest to Kalladka

BENGALURU, 19 JAN

High Court of Karnataka on Friday extended the protection against coercive action by the state against RSS leader Kalladka Prabhakar Bhat in connection with his speech made on 24 December in Srirangapatna allegedly disparaging Muslim women.Bhat is alleged to have stated that "Modi Government gave permanent husbands to Muslim women", among others.Court directed the state to submit the entire transcript of the speech made by Bhat before it.This followed the argument of the counsel for Bhat, Arun Shyam, who submitted before the court that selective phrases and words from his speech have been mined to show him in bad light. ***—PTI***

Farmers stage 'rail roko' in Latur district

LATUR, 19 JAN

A group of farmers attempted to stage a 'rail roko' in Maharashtra's Latur district to protest the arrest of their leader in Buldhana on Friday, police said.The police detained some of the protesting farmers who gathered at Harangul railway station on the outskirts of the city, an official said. Ravindra Tupkar, the leader of a farmers' organisation, was arrested in Buldhana, following which a group of farmers staged an agitation in Latur, he said. Protesters also demanded that the government declare a drought, ensure the distribution of crop insurance and sanction the Rs 9,000 price for soybean crops, among other demands. ***—PTI***

My govt inspired by Ram: PM in B'luru

He opened Boeing's largest campus outside US in City

BENGALURU, 19 JAN

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday said his government is inspired by Lord Ram's principles of governance with honesty and urged people to light Ram Jyoti on 22 January. He stressing that it will be an inspiration to remove poverty from their lives.

Modi on Friday inaugurated Boeing's new global engineering and technology centre campus in Bengaluru.

Built at a cost of Rs 1,600 crore, the 43-acre state-of-the-art Boeing India Engineering and Technology Centre (BIETC) campus is the planemaker's largest such investment outside the US, the company said.

Modi also launched the Boeing Sukanya Programme that the company said aims to support the entry of more girl children from across India into the country's growing aviation sector.

The programme will provide opportunities for girls and women from across India to learn critical skills in the science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) fields and train for jobs in the aviation sector, a company statement said.

Siddaramaiah greets Narendra Modi during the inauguration of BIETC campus, in Bengaluru ***PHOTO: MOAHMMED ASAD***

For young girls, the programme will create STEM Labs at 150 planned locations to help spark interest in STEM careers. It will also provide scholarships to women who are training to be pilots.

Modi on urged international investors to link their growth with India's rapid rise, saying the country is becoming one of the most well-connected markets. He emphasised the government's efforts to increase women's participation in every sector and also reiterated India's push towards women-led development during its G20 Presidency.

He said Bengaluru is a city that links aspirations to innovations and achievements, and India's tech potential to global demands. "Boeing's new technology campus is going to strengthen this belief." He said the new Boeing facility demonstrates India's commitment to driving global tech, research and innovation, design and demand. "This strengthens the 'Make in India-Make for the World' resolution," Modi said.

He said that India has become the world's third largest aviation domestic market. In a decade, the number of domestic passengers has doubled, and schemes like UDAN have played a big role in this.

This number is going to increase further, leading to increased demand. This has resulted in India's airlines placing new fleet orders and giving impetus to the global aviation sector.He said India is becoming one of the most well-connected markets, adding that today India has about 150 operational airports, up from about 70 in 2014. Modi also visited Maharashtra. With a few months to go before the Lok Sabha polls, this was his second visit to the state in one week. *—PTI*

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WORLD'S TALLEST AMBEDKAR STATUE

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy on Friday inaugurated a 125-foot tall statue of BR Ambedkar in Vijayawada built at a cost of Rs 400 crore. It is the world's tallest statue of Ambedkar and is erected on an 81-foot tall concrete pedestal. The statue was made with steel framing and bronze cladding, requiring 400 MT of stainless steel and 120 MT of bronze ***PHOTO: ANI***

SC refuses more time for Bilkis' convicts to surrender

NEW DELHI, 19 JAN

Eleven convicts in the case of gangrape of Bilkis Bano and the murder of seven of her family members during the 2002 riots in Gujarat will have to surrender on 21 January as the Supreme Court on Friday dismissed their plea seeking an extension of time to surrender.

Observing that the reasons cited by the convicts have no merits, a bench of justices BV Nagarathna and Ujjal Bhuyan refused to grant them relaxation.

The convicts had moved the apex court on Thursday seeking more time to surrender.

The reasons seeking extension of the deadline to surrender included failing health, impending surgery, son's marriage and harvesting ripe crops.

The first five convicts who had sought relief are Govind Nai, Pradeep Mordhiya, Bipin Chandra Joshi, Ramesh Chandana and Mitesh Bhatt. Later, the remaining convicts also moved a similar plea. "The respondent himself is an old man who is suffering from asthma and is in really poor health. It is further submitted that the respondent was recently operated upon and had to undergo an angiography," Nai said in his pleaChandana said he was looking after his crops and that were ready for harvest. He said he is the only male member in the family and has to take care of the crops.

"Further, applicant's young son is of marriageable age and the applicant bears the responsibility to look after this affair and with kind indulgence of this Honourable Court may even complete this affair," Chandana said. Mordhiya submitted he requires regular consultation with doctors after he underwent a lung surgery. Another convict Mitesh Bhatt said his winter crops are ready for harvest and he needs to complete the task. *—PTI*

Bilkis Bano ***PHOTO: PTI***

'Convicts under watch, not missing'

Dahod, 19 Jan

A senior police official in Dahod district of Gujarat on Friday said all the convicts in the 2002 Bilkis Bano gangrape case were under "police watch", and they have not been missing. "We contacted all of them on that day itself and it did not appear that they had any intention of going incommunicado after the verdict," said Assistant Superintendent of Police, Limkheda division, Bishakha Jain. *—PTI*

COURT RAPS VARSITIES

Don't drive transgenders to courts for certificates: HC

BENGALURU, 19 JAN

The High Court of Karnataka has directed educational institutions to follow the Supreme Court guidelines and not force people to approach courts for change in name and gender in educational certificates.

The court gave the direction while allowing a petition by a transgender seeking a fresh post-graduation certificate from the Manipal University with his new male name.

Noting that there were "innumerable such instances awaiting consideration before universities/educational institutions," the HC said.

"It is observed that it would be appropriate for said authorities to process applications for change of name and gender upon receipt of requests keeping in mind ratio laid down by Supreme Court in National Legal Services Authority's case and this Court in Christina Lobo's case instead of driving all applicants to Court for securing directions." Vihaan Peethambar approached the High Court with a petition that was heard by Justice Ravi V Hosmani and disposed on 5 January.

High Court ***PHOTO: PTI***

Senior counsel Jayna Kothari appearing for Vihaan submitted that he had completed PG MS Communication course in the university in 2008 and was awarded the certificate and marksheet under the name 'Jyothi Peethambar'.

Though female by birth, he underwent gender reassignment surgeries in 2015 and changed his gender to male and name to 'Vihaan Peethambar.' He obtained fresh PAN, Aadhar, Voter ID, passport and degree certificates in his name.

However, the Manipal university rejected his request in 2017 stating that the change was only possible within a short duration after the certificate was first issued.

The High Court, citing the two judgements, said guidelines were issued by the Supreme Court for such cases.

Allowing the petition, it said, "Petitioner is permitted to file representation appending original marks cards and degree certificate to Registrar of respondent no.1 - University, within a period of four weeks. Upon receipt of the same, respondent no.1 - University shall consider it for taking action as per the ratio laid down by Supreme Court in NLSA's case and Christina Lobo's case within four weeks thereafter." *—PTI*

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FIR AGAINST NYAY YATRA OVER ROUTE IN ASSAM

JORHAT, 19 JAN

An FIR was lodged against Congress' 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra' and its Chief organizer KB Byju for reportedly deviating from the approved route within Jorhat town, Assam, on Thursday.

According to officials, yatra deviated from the permitted KB Road route, causing a "chaotic situation" in the area. Reacting to the FIR, Leader of the Opposition Debabrata Saikia said that the it is a deliberate move aimed at creating hurdles for the Yatra. Congress General Secretary Jairam Ramesh said, "No rules have been broken. Assam Chief Minister is making all attempts to stop people from joining the Bharat Jodo Nyaya Yatra. No one can stop this yatra. We are in Assam for the next 7 years. Let them arrest us, we accept the challenge. Meanwhile, Rahul Gandhi in a post on X said, "The Chief Minister of Assam is the most corrupt Chief Minister of India, whose only work is to loot public money." *—PTI*

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'Architects can approve building plans'

BENGALURU, 19 JAN

Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on Friday said that architects would soon be allowed to self-declare building plans, without depending on Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) for approvals.

Speaking at an event organised by the Indian Institute of Interior Designing, he said, "People have to run from pillar to post in BBMP to obtain building approvals. We will soon issue a government order enabling authorised architects to self-declare the building plan without having the need to get it approved from the BBMP.

"The authorised architects can function (in) the same (way) as chartered accountants do. They can design the building within the legal provisions and self-declare it to the BBMP. We believe that all of you will uphold the law of the land. This initiative is to prevent corruption and harassment from BBMP officials," he said.

The (technology in) building and interior designing has been evolving. The competition for you is international now. You will need to think innovatively so that you stay relevant in your field," he said. *—PTI*

TMC to contest all 42 seats in WB, says Didi

KOLKATA, 19 JAN

Amid rumblings within the INDIA bloc in West Bengal over seat sharing, TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee on Friday asserted that her party is ready to independently contest all 42 Lok Sabha seats in the state if not given "due importance".

Banerjee, also the chief minister, conveyed her stance during a closed-door organisational meeting of the party's Murshidabad district unit a region with a significant minority population, and traditionally seen as a Congress stronghold.

During the meeting, she urged party leaders to gear up for the electoral battle, emphasising the need for TMC's triumph in all three Lok Sabha seats in the district.

In the 2019 elections, Congress had managed to retain only the Baharampur seat, secured by its five-time MP and state Congress President Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury.

"Our party supremo Mamata Banerjee clearly stated that the TMC is one of the most important partners of the INDIA bloc. But in Bengal, if RSP, CPI, CPI(M) are given more importance by excluding us, we will carve our own path, and preparations should be made to fight and win in all the 42 seats," a senior TMC leader, requesting anonymity, said.

The CPI(M)-led Left Front, Congress and the TMC are part of the 28-party strong INDIA opposition bloc. However, in West Bengal, the CPI(M) and Congress have aligned against the TMC and BJP. *—PTI*

PM RASHTRIYA BAL PURASKAR

Jakkur chess prodigy wins nat'l award

MEGHANA PRASAD
BENAGLURU, 19 JAN

Chess prodigy Charvi Anilkumar from Bengaluru has been selected for the Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar, 2024. She is the youngest and only chess player from Karnataka to receive this highest award. President Droupadi Murmu will confer the award on 22 January. The Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar is the highest civilian honour for children in India.

The nine-year-old became the World Champion in the Under-8 category at the 2022 World Cadets Chess Championship held in Georgia. This month, Charvi became the highest-rated girl player globally, born in or after 2013.

Charvi Anilkumar ***PHOTO: X/ @CHARVI_A2014***

The prodigy is the only female player under 11 to surpass the 1,900 ELO mark, a measure to determine chess player ratings.

Charvi, who lives in Bengaluru's Jakkur, travels to Chennai for training under RB Ramesh, who also mentors R Praggnanandhaa.

Charvi's mother Akhila told Salar News, "Since it is the highest civilian award for children, we are elated and honoured to receive this award from the President. This award will encourage Charvi to work more and bring laurels to India."

"She has won over a hundred trophies," said Akhila, adding, "However, the National Under-8 Girls and Under-10 Championship are dearer to us as she was only eight-year-old when she achieved it. She even won the World Cadets Chess Championship held in 2022, and bagged a silver in Asian New Championship," the mother said.

She has won five gold and one silver medal for India in Asian Championship events.

She is also the Commonwealth championship winner that was held in Sri Lanka.

Akhila who previously was a techie, quit her job to ensure that Charvi could follow her passion and achieve more for this country. *—Salar News*

Money markets to open at 2.30 pm on 22 Jan

MUMBAI, 19 JAN

Reserve Bank on Friday said money markets will open at 2.30 pm instead of 9 am on 22 January, with the government announcing a half-day holiday in connection with the consecration of the Ram temple in Ayodhya.

In view of the half-day closing on 22 January announced by the Government of India, the trading hours for the various markets have also been truncated, according to a circular.

The central bank regulated markets are : Call/notice/term money; Market repo in Government Securities; Tri-party repo in Government Securities; Commercial paper and Certificates of Deposit; Repo in Corporate Bonds; Government Securities (Central Government Securities, State Government Securities and Treasury Bills); Foreign Currency (FCY)/Indian Rupee (INR).

Reserve Bank of India ***PHOTO: PTI***

The Department of Personnel and Training issued an order for a half-day closure for central government establishment on Monday.

Public sector banks, insurance companies, financial institutions and regional rural banks (RRBs) across the country will remain closed for half day on 22 January. *—PTI*

CRIME BEAT

Cop suspended for allegedly aiding sand mafia

MANGALURU, 19 JAN

The police inspector of Kankanady police station in the city has been suspended for his alleged role in supporting the sand mafia in the region.City Police Commissioner Anupam Agarwal issued the order suspending Inspector HS Bhajantri, after Assistant Commissioner of Police(ACP) Dhanya Nayak reported that the inspector was neglecting the instructions of higher-ups to act against illegal sand extraction.It is reported that Bhajantri had ignored the instructions of top officials to raid an illegal sand extraction site at Kadekaru in Jeppinamogaru. The report also mentioned that the inspector was not behaving courteously with people visiting the station with complaints, police sources said.*—PTI*

13-year-old drowns in Nethravati river

MANGALURU, 19 JAN

A 13-year-old boy drowned in the Nethravati River after he slipped and fell into the waters while playing with other children at Navoora village in Bantwal taluk of Dakshina Kannada district, police sources said. The deceased has been identified as Prajwal Nayak of Kodibailu in Navoora. He had been to the riverside with other children and was playing when he accidentally slipped into the river. Though he was immediately brought ashore by local divers, his life could not be saved. Bantwal rural police have registered a case. *—PTI*

Cops crack theft case in 12 hours, employee held

DAVANGERE, 19 JAN

City police solved a theft case within 12 hours after Rs 10.88 lakh was stolen from a safe locker at Credit Axis Grameen Limited's office in Sivakumaraswamy layout on 15 January.
The amount was stored in the office's safe as the employees were not able to deposit it in the bank locker due to a holiday. Police investigation revealed that the employee Kiran Kumar KB, a resident of Yeravvanagathihalli and a former worker were the accused. The police recovered Rs 10.88 lakh after Kiran's arrest. CCTV camera footage helped the police identify the culprit.
—Salar News

BIFF gears up for its 15th edition

BENGALURU, 19 JAN

The 15th edition of the Bengaluru International Film Festival (BIFF) is set to showcase nearly 200 films from about 50 countries across various categories, aiming to act as empowerment tools for society. "The festival will pay homage to Vijaya Bhasker, veteran music composer; CV Shivashankar, director and producer; Vani Jayaram, veteran singer," said Trilok Chandra, Chairman of Chalana Chitra Academy. A thematic documentary film session focusing on human rights and values will also be held. The festival will showcase internationally acclaimed films from major global festivals.
The festival includes workshops on film editing, screenwriting, cinematography, technology's impact on cinema, music, human rights in films, and more.
Scheduled to take place from 29 February to 7 March, the festival will screen films at 11 venues, including PVR Cinemas at Orion Mall, Rajajinagar; Kalavidara Sangha Raj Kumar Auditorium in Chamarajpet, and Suchitra Film Society Auditorium in Banashankari 2nd stage.
—Salar News

SC panel recommends HC CJ as top court judge

Varale was elevated to HC CJ of State on 15 Oct, 2022

NEW DELHI, 19 JAN

Supreme Court collegium headed by Chief Justice DY Chandrachud on Friday recommended the elevation of State High Court Chief Justice Prasanna B Varale as a top court judge.

In another decision, it recommended Justice PS Dinesh Kumar's name for appointment as the Chief Justice of the High Court.

If Justice Varale's name is cleared by Centre, he would become the third sitting apex court judge from a Scheduled Caste community. The others are Justices BR Gavai and CT Ravikumar.

Justice Varale was appointed as a judge of the High Court of Bombay on 18 July, 2008, and elevated to the chief justice of the High Court of Karnataka on 15 October, 2022.

According to the collegium, Justice Varale acquired considerable experience as a judge of the High Court of Bombay and as the chief justice of the High Court of Karnataka.

"The judgments authored by him deal with a variety of issues in every field of law. He is a competent judge with unimpeachable conduct and integrity and has throughout maintained a high standard of professional ethics.

Justice Varale was appointed as a judge of the High Court of Bombay on 18 July, 2008 *PHOTO: PTI*

- According to the collegium, Justice Varale acquired considerable experience as a judge of the High Court of Bombay and as the chief justice of the High Court of Karnataka

"Before his elevation as a Judge of the High Court, he practised at the Bar for over 23 years in civil, criminal, labour and administrative law matters in District and Sessions Court and Constitutional matters at the High Court Bench at Aurangabad. Justice Varale stands at Sl No.6 in the combined all-India seniority of High Court Judges," the collegium said.

"In the seniority of Judges of the High Court of Bombay, he is the senior-most Judge," it added.

In a meeting held on Friday, the collegium, also comprising Justices Sanjiv Khanna, B R Gavai, Surya Kant and Aniruddha Bose, took into consideration the fact that Varale is among the senior-most high court judges and is the only high court chief justice from the Scheduled Caste.

"We are also conscious of the fact that at present, there are three judges from the High Court of Bombay on the Bench of the Supreme Court. The Collegium, therefore, unanimously resolves to recommend that Mr Justice Prasanna B Varale be appointed as a Judge of the Supreme Court of India," it said.

Recommending Justice P S Dinesh Kumar's name for appointment as the Karnataka High Court chief justice, the collegium noted that the position would fall vacant with Justice Varale's elevation to the Supreme Court and therefore, an appointment to the office was required to be made.

"Justice Pratinidhi Srinivasacharya Dinesh Kumar was appointed as a judge of the High Court of Karnataka on January 2, 2015. He has acquired sufficient experience on the judicial and administrative side as a puisne judge of the high court. He is due to demit office on superannuation on February 24, 2024, and will have a tenure as a Chief Justice of little over a month," it said.

Collegium also took note of the vacancy that arose in Supreme Court with the retirement of Justice Sanjay Kishan Kaul on 25 December, 2023. *—PTI*

LOK SABHA POLLS 2024

Speculation is rife that some ministers might be asked to contest *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

Cong LS panel mulls probable candidates

BENGALURU, 19, JAN

The first meeting comprising senior Congress leaders and the 18-member election panel of Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC) was held in Bengaluru on Friday to discuss the Lok Sabha poll's probable candidates.

The elections are scheduled to be held April-May.

Congress is targeting to win 20 of 28 Lok Sabha seats in Karnataka after its performance in the Assembly polls last May.

In the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, Congress just won one seat of the 21 it contested, while its ally JD(S) secured one seat of the seven.

In the upcoming polls, speculation is rife that some ministers might be asked to contest considering the stakes are high with the party having to face BJP and JD(S), who have entered into a poll alliance. Congress' high command has reportedly warned the state leadership against a poor performance in the elections.

- Congress is targeting to win 20 of 28 Lok Sabha seats in Karnataka after its performance in the Assembly polls last May.

The Lok Sabha panel members are Siddaramaiah, Chief Minister; DK Shivakumar, Deputy Chief Minister; Congress Working Committee (CWC) members Syed Naseer Hussain and BK Hariprasad; G Parameshwara, Home Minister; M Veerappa Moily, former chief minister and CWC member; MB Patil, Large and Medium Industries Minister; Dinesh Gundu Rao, Health Minister; HK Patil, Law Minister; KH Muniyappa, Food and Civil Supplies Minister; Eshwar Khandre, Wildlife and Forest Minister; Ramalinga Reddy, Transport and Muzrai Minister; Satish Jarkiholi, Public Works Minister; MLA RV Deshpande; party functionaries Saleem Ahmed and Allum Veerabhadrappa; MLC Jagadish Shettar, and former MP BN Chandrappa.

The State panel will shortlist the names of the candidates, which will be vetted by the AICC election screening committee before it goes to CEC.

—Salar News

Traffic snarls in City during Modi's visit

BENGALURU, 19 JAN

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to City on Friday created bumper-to-bumper traffic across the city on Friday. Traffic snarls were witnessed in Central Business Districts (CBD).

The other roads including Airport flyover, Hebbal stretch and Millers Tank Bund road face traffic snarls too. Commuters had to take lengthy detours as the traffic police had blocked several roads. "It took me an hour from my home in Sadashivnagar to reach MG Road, and I had to take many detours," said S Spoorty.

The commuters complained that the trip which would take them 10 minutes every day, had taken them 45 minutes on Friday. Modi visited City to inaugurate Boeing's India Engineering and Technology Centre (BIETC) near Devanahalli.

Traffic movement was restricted at Gollahalli Gate to Hunachuru (KIADB Industrial Area), Airlines Dhabi (NH 648) to Budigere, and Hennur-Bagalur Main Road to Airport Road among other areas. Traffic on the Airport road was also affected due to the VIP movement. *—Salar News*

High Court junks B'desh woman's plea

BENGALURU, 19 JAN

The High Court of Karnataka has dismissed a petition filed by a Bangladeshi woman seeking extension of her stay in India.The woman's Indian husband is absconding and without his consent for the dependent visa (X-1 visa) it cannot be extended. The HC also noted that her activities in India were suspicious as she was in constant touch with an organisation called SSG in Bangladesh which had connections with that country's military.

The petition before the HC was filed by one Raktima Khanum, 46, which was heard by Justice M Nagaprasanna. The woman claimed to have fallen in love with one Janardhana Reddy, a resident of Bengaluru and an Indian citizen.

The two got married in December 2017 and the woman claimed that Reddy had converted to Islam. The couple lived in Chennai but soon their love floundered and the woman went back to Bangladesh as the tourist visa she was staying on had expired, she said.

When she applied for a visa again, it was converted to an entry visa -- a dependent visa -- which was valid till February 2020. She sought extension of the visa, and it was granted for six months as she was married to an Indian. The visa was again extended later till 21 June, 2023. When another extension was sought, the authorities demanded that she produce an undertaking/consent form the sponsor/parents/spouse as she was on a dependent visa.She approached the high court when she sought another extension authorities demanded *—PTI*

DOCUMENTARY ROW: HC FRAMES CHARGES FOR VIOLATING ORDERS

BENGALURU, 19 JAN

A division bench of the Karnataka High Court has framed charges against documentary filmmakers Amoghavarsha J S, Sarath Champati, broadcasters BBC, Discovery and Netflix among others in a civil contempt of court petition.

Court framed the charges on Thursday in a case where the filmmakers and broadcasters are accused of disobeying a 2021 interim order of the court regarding the release and telecast of the documentary film 'Wild Karnataka.'The original complainants in the case are Ravindra N Redkar and Ullash Kumar R K.

After signing a Mou with the Karnataka Forest Department (KFD) to shoot a documentary, the accused allegedly used the services of the KFD like transport and shooting permissions without paying any charges. *—PTI*

Chandrayaan-3 serving as location marker: ISRO

BENGALURU, 19 JAN

An instrument on Chandrayaan-3 lander has started serving as a location marker near the lunar south pole, the ISRO said on Friday.

The Laser Retroreflector Array (LRA) on the Chandrayaan-3 lander has begun serving as a fiducial point (precisely located markers for reference) on the Moon, the national space agency headquartered here said in a statement.

US space agency NASA's Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter (LRO) achieved a laser range measurement using the LRA by successfully detecting signals reflected by it on 12 December, 2023, it said.

"The ranging utilised the Lunar Orbiter Laser Altimeter (LOLA) on the LRO. The observation occurred during lunar night time, with the LRO ascending to the east of Chandrayaan-3," ISRO said.

NASA's LRA was accommodated on the Chandrayaan-3 Vikram lander under international collaboration.

It comprises eight corner-cube retroreflectors on a hemispherical support structure. This array facilitates lasers ranging from various directions by any orbiting spacecraft with suitable instruments.

PHOTO: PTI

The passive optical instrument, weighing about 20grams, is designed to last for decades on the lunar surface.

Landed near the lunar south pole on 23 August,2023, Chandrayaan-3's Vikram lander has been accessible for LOLA measurements since then, ISRO said.

While several LRAs have been deployed on the Moon since the beginning of lunar exploration, the LRA on Chandrayaan-3 is a miniature version and is the only one available near the south pole currently, the statement said. *—PTI*

Vijayendra wants State holiday on 22 January

BENGALURU, 19 JAN

State BJP President BY Vijayendra on Friday urged Chief Minister Siddaramaiah to declare 22 January as a public holiday due to the Ram Mandir inauguration.

Speaking at BJP Scheduled Tribe Morcha on Friday, Vijayendra hailed the relationship between BJP and the ST community. He credited former chief minister Basavaraj Bommai and BS Yediyurappa for raising the reservation quota for STs.

Vijayendra also attacked Congress and dubbed their guarantees as a political gimmick. "Congress is good only to make long speeches. However, BJP is different as it acts on its promises such as Yediyurappa government announcing a holiday for Valmiki Jayanti."

BY Vijayendra *PHOTO: PTI*

—Salar News

State forms ministers' panel to hold job fairs

BENGALURU, 19 JAN

State has formed a panel under Sharan Prakash, Medical Education and Skill Development Minister Patil, to organise job fairs at the district and state level to help unemployed youth.

The committee was formed by Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and consists of Large and Medium Industries Minister MB Patil, Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister HK Patil, Higher Education Minister MC Sudhakar, Health Minister, Dinesh Gundu Rao, IT and BT Minister Priyank Kharge, Labour Minister Santosh Lad and Youth Services and Sports Minister B Nagendra.

The Committee will organise job fairs in coordination with the large-scale and small-scale industries and software companies. The committee is planning to give priority to Kannadigas in the job fair.

Patil has already held discussions with the officials of the concerned departments and other stakeholders on recruiting for the vacant posts in the government sector and creating jobs in the private sector.

The unemployed youths in the rural areas are expected to get job opportunities in the IT-BT, hotel, manufacturing, banking and other sectors through this job fair.

The committee formation move comes after the launch of the Yuva Nidhi guarantee scheme on 12 January in Shivamogga.

—Salar News

2 dead after school collapses in Bengaluru

BENGALURU, 19 JAN

Two people were killed and 13 others injured after an under-construction school building collapsed in Anekal taluk in Bengaluru.

Deceased are Vishwas, 43, and Sayed Ali Mandal, both from Kolkata. Over 15 labourers from Kolkata and Jharkhand were working at the site when the incident happened.The collapse occurred during the construction of a portico on the second floor of the building.

Deputy Superintendent of Police, Mohan Kumar BS, told Salar News, "JCB operations beneath second floor along with the construction works were underway when building collapsed. We are investigating the cause, and after the post-mortem, arrangements will be made to transfer their bodies to Kolkata." *—Salar News*

FLOWER SHOW

Lalbagh is now hosting Republic Day flower show, organised by the Department of Horticulture, in Bengaluru on Thursday *PHOTO: PTI*

UPING THE GAME

B'luru KIA wins Best Airport of the Year Award

BENGALURU, 19 JAN

Kempegowda International Airport (KIA) has been recognised as the Best Airport of the Year at the Wings India Awards 2024.

At the award ceremony held in Hyderabad on 18 January, the airport was also conferred with the '>25 MPPA Traffic Award' under the airports category.

The recognition was made after looking at the measures taken regarding operational excellence, passenger experience, environmental stewardship, and making use of the latest technologies.

In the past year, the airport saw an increase in passengers. Hence, the airport has increased its number of entry gates, check-in counters and information display boards. All international operations were moved from Terminal 1 to Terminal 2, which spans 255,661 square metres, equipped to handle 25 million passengers annually.

PHOTO: PTI

- Recognition was based on measures taken regarding operational excellence, passenger experience, environmental stewardship, and making use of the latest technologies

The airport has also banned the use of plastic on-premises and has taken afforestation drives. The airport has 60 artworks that display the culture and heritage of India. The airport secured the top position as the most punctual airport in October 2023.

The awards were presented by Union Civil Aviation Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia. Vistara was conferred with the Best Airline of the Year award while Air India was recognised for its International connectivity. On the other hand, the award for regional connectivity went to Alliance Air.

—Salar News

ED issues fresh summons to Lalu and son Tejashwi

PATNA, 19 JAN

ED has issued fresh summons to RJD chief Lalu Prasad and his son and Bihar deputy chief minister Tejashwi Yadav to appear for questioning at its Patna office in connection with the alleged railways land-for-jobs money laundering case, official sources said on Friday. While Prasad has been asked to depose on January 29, Tejashwi has been called the next day on 30 January. A team went to the official residence of Prasad's wife and former Bihar chief minister Rabri Devi in Patna to deliver the summons, they said.The two have been asked to depose at the Enforcement Directorate office on Bank Road in the capital. The duo had skipped the earlier summonses issued in this case. The alleged scam pertains to the period when Prasad was the railway minister in the UPA-1 government. *—PTI*

SP, RLD announce Lok Sabha alliance; SP gets 7 seats in UP

LUCKNOW, 19 JAN

The Samajwadi Party and the Rashtriya Lok Dal on Friday announced their alliance for the Lok Sabha polls, with the RLD saying that the other party will leave seven seats in western Uttar Pradesh for its nominees.SP president Akhilesh Yadav and RLD chief Jayant Chaudhary announced the tie-up for the elections later this year on social media."Congratulations to everyone on the alliance of RLD and SP. Let us all unite for victory," Yadav said in a post on X. Reposting this tweet, Chaudhary said, "Always ready to protect national and constitutional values. We expect all workers of our alliance to move forward together for the development and prosperity of our region."He also posted pictures of the two leaders shaking hands.An RLD spokesperson told PTI that the seat-sharing deal was finalised at a meeting between the two leaders. *—PTI*

AAP holding talks on Lok Sabha seat from Goa with INDIA

PANAJI, 19 JAN

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) on Friday indicated that it was keen on contesting the upcoming Lok Sabha elections from Goa, with its national convener and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal saying his party was holding talks on a seat in the coastal state with INDIA bloc constituents.Goa has two Lok Sabha constituencies - North Goa and South Goa. However, Kejriwal did not specify which of the two seats the AAP was eyeing to contest."AAP is discussing a Goa seat as a part of the INDIA alliance. We will come back to you once something is decided. Whatever discussion that takes place, do vote for INDIA alliance candidate in the Lok Sabha elections," Kejriwal said while addressing a public meeting in Benaulim assembly segment in South Goa.*—PTI*

Sarees across India to adorn Kartavya Path on R-Day

NEW DELHI, 19 JAN

Culture Ministry on Friday announced it will have on display sarees from different states and Union Territories along the Kartavya Path during Republic Day celebration to give people a glimpse of the sartorial diversity of the country.The country will mark its 75th Republic Day on 26 January with preparations in full swing for it."A highlight of this year's Republic Day parade will be the spectacular display of sarees from different states and union territories of India in the form of 'Anant Sutra'."This is the entire country's tribute to the women power of India and the millions of weavers of India," the Culture Ministry posted on X.The ministry also posted a representative video of what the display would look like at the venue.The display has been named 'Anant Sutra'. *—PTI*

Our objective is to make TN sports capital of nation: Stalin

He said this at Khelo India Youth Games, which was inaugurated by Prime Minister

CHENNAI, 19 JAN

Making Tamil Nadu the sports capital of the nation is a key objective of the state government, Chief Minister MK Stalin said here on Friday.

In his address at the Khelo India Youth Games 2023, which was inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, he said his government is working hard to take the state to the first position in all sectors.

Making Tamil Nadu the sports capital of the nation is a key objective like the goal of achieving one trillion dollar economy, he said.After the DMK regime took over in 2021, several 'historic' sports events including the 44th Chess Olympiad, ATP Challenger tour, Chennai Open Challenger tour, men's Asian Champions Trophy 2023 and Squash World Cup 2023 were held in Chennai. The Chief Minister listed several sports related initiatives of his government, including setting up Olympic Academies in Chennai, Madurai, Tiruchirappalli and the Nilgiris, mini stadiums in 10 Assembly segments in the first phase, district sports centres in newly carved out districts such as Tenkasi, which provide a boost to the sports infrastructure. A Jallikattu arena (stadium), built at a cost of Rs 62.77 crore will be inaugurated by him on 24 January.

In a spirit of brotherhood, sports persons from Manipur were recently trained in Chennai and some of them are taking part in the Khelo India Games. Expressing happiness about Tamil Nadu hosting for the first time the Khelo India Games, the Chief Minister said the state's traditional game of fencing 'Silambam' has been included as a 'demonstration game.'

Tamil poet Thiruvalluvar and valourous woman freedom fighter Velu Nachiar are featured in the official logo of the Games and these are a matter of pride. *—PTI*

Prime Minister with Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin during opening of 6th Khelo India Youth Games in Chennai, Friday *PTI*

- Making Tamil Nadu the sports capital of the nation is a key objective of the state government, Chief Minister MK Stalin said here on Friday.

Did not face so many difficulties anywhere as in Assam: Ramesh

MAJULI, 19 JAN

Congress General Secretary Jairam Ramesh on Friday claimed that the party's first Bharat Jodo Yatra from south to north had not faced as many problems while passing through BJP-ruled states as the second one is encountering in Assam.

Wondering why Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma was 'afraid' of the Congress, Ramesh asserted that no power can prevent the ongoing 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra' from proceeding with its scheduled itinerary in Assam.

"The first Bharat Jodo Yatra did not face so many difficulties even when passing through BJP-ruled states," Ramesh said at a press conference here as the ongoing march entered its second day in Assam.

"The amount of difficulties we have faced in Assam in these two days, we have not faced anywhere," Ramesh claimed.

Jairam Ramesh *HOTO:PTI*

He pointed out that the first Yatra had crossed then BJP-ruled states Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra, and the Congress had criticised the Chief Ministers and governments there.

An FIR has been lodged in Jorhat on Thursday against the Yatra and its chief organiser KB Byju for the entourage allegedly deviating from permitted routes in Jorhat town.

Ramesh asserted that 'no power' can prevent the Yatra from completing its next six days of scheduled programmes in Assam, with the journey to continue through the state till 25 January, travelling a total of 833 km across 17 districts.

He said the Yatra will be entering Arunachal Pradesh on Saturday and resume in Assam the next day with a public rally at Kaliabor on Sunday, which will also be attended by Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge.

He also accused the Chief Minister of giving the Yatra a communal colour and maintained that it goes on to show the latter's mentality.

He claimed that rattled by the people's response, Sarma is trying to derail the Yatra.

"Bhoi nokoriba, Himanta (don't be afraid, Himanta). I want to ask him what it is he is so afraid of?" he said.

"In Assam politics, this Yatra has made a huge difference in two days itself. Youth, women, senior citizens, all sections of people cutting across religions, castes, languages are welcoming the Yatra," he claimed. *—PTI*

'Assam CM rattled by response to Cong yatra'

MAJULI, 19 JAN

Rattled by the people's response, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma was trying to derail the Rahul Gandhi-led Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra in the state, senior Congress leader Jairam Ramesh alleged on Friday morning.Ramesh asserted that the Yatra will, however, continue with its itinerary in the state for another six days as scheduled."It is abundantly clear that the Assam CM is rattled and is nervous by the tremendous response being received by the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra over the past 2 days in Assam," he posted on X as the entourage reached Majuliisland.He said that people from all sections of Assam's diverse society and age groups have been "enthusiastically welcoming" Gandhi."The Assam CM can abuse and defame, he can threaten and intimidate but we are not afraid. He is obviously disturbed by the huge impact of the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra, which will continue in Assam for another 6 days in spite of his continuing efforts to derail it," he added. *—PTI*

SC refuses to interfere with AIADMK expelling OP & aides

NEW DELHI, 19 JAN

In a setback to expelled AIADMK leader O Panneerselvam, the Supreme Court on Friday refused to interfere with the party general council resolutions removing him and his supporters and electing his rival Edappadi K Palaniswami as interim Chief.

The top court also refused to interfere with the 25 August, 2023 order of the Madras High Court rejecting the pleas of O Panneerselvam and his supporters.

A bench of justices Sanjiv Khanna and Dipankar Datta told senior advocate KK Venugopal, appearing for Paneerselvam and other senior counsel appearing for his supporters, that it is not inclined to interfere with the high court order.

The bench said interfering with the resolution would amount to allowing the suit (challenging the resolutions passed by the general council on 11 July, 2022), pending before the civil court.

"If we interfere at this juncture, it will create huge chaos. To us it appears, there is a split within the party, it will work itself out. Sometimes, it's better to let things work themselves out. Sorry, we are not inclined to interfere with the high court order," the bench said.

The top court, however, directed for expeditious hearing of the pending suits and gave liberty to Panneerselvam and his aides to move application before the civil court for consolidation of all the suits.

At the outset, Venugopal said his prayer is to stay the general council resolution removing Panneerselvam from the party, which was passed without it being there in the agenda of the meeting.

Justice Khanna told Venugopal that the High Court has held that a prima facie case may be made out but the balance of convenience is not there.

Venugopal said the suit will take years to decide and urged the court to direct for expeditious hearing. *—PTI*

PHOTO:PTI

- In a setback to expelled AIADMK leader O Panneerselvam, the Supreme Court on Friday refused to interfere with the party general council resolutions removing him and his supporters and electing his rival Edappadi K Palaniswami as interim Chief.

CHANGE IN GUARD?

The RJD called the meeting of the alliance leaders part of the ongoing seat-sharing process *PHOTO: PTI*

Lalu meets Nitish; all is well, claims Tejashwi

PATNA, 19 JAN

RJD President Lalu Prasad on Friday called on ally Nitish Kumar, the Chief Minister of Bihar who also heads the JD(U), at his residence. Prasad was accompanied by his son Tejashwi Yadav, the Deputy Chief Minister."I feel sorry when you people ask questions that seem so divorced from ground reality. Why is there so much curiosity about when seat-sharing was likely to be final in Mahagathbandhan? Has the BJP-led NDA sorted it out in its own camp? Nobody cares about that," said Tejashwi.

Speculations are rife that the JD(U), which won 16 seats in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls that it fought as an NDA partner, would not agree to a lesser number this time while the RJD, which drew a blank, would insist on a lion's share citing its superior numerical strength in the Assembly.

Yadav was also asked about Union Home Minister Amit Shah's interview in which his response to a query on Kumar, who dumped the BJP less than two years ago, was being interpreted as an admission of doors not being shut on the JD(U) boss.

The young RJD leader replied sarcastically, "I do not know. Maybe you people have better knowledge of what Amit Shah wanted to imply."

Yadav, who is on the ED radar, and has skipped more than one summonses issued by the agency, said, "We are running a government that will not be distracted from the agenda of working for the people. The RJD and the JD(U) are firmly together and will jointly contest the Lok Sabha polls to defeat the BJP." Kumar, an old BJP partner, had called off the alliance in August 2023, accusing the saffron party of trying to split the JD(U) and vowing to defeat the NDA in 2024 by bringing together the entire Opposition.

He played a key role in INDIA bloc's formation, and hosted the first meeting in Patna of leaders opposed to the BJP who agreed to huddle together burying past differences. *—PTI*

FIRST LOOK OF RAM LALLA IDOL

BJP says WB obstructing celebrations

BJP on Friday accused TMC government of impeding programmes to celebrate the inauguration of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya on 22 January, triggering a strong denial from the TMC.The Calcutta High Court's approval of TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee's harmony rally on the same day, has fueled a heated jabs in the state.

NDRF DEPLOYS HAZMAT VEHICLES, RESCUE TEAMS

Multiple National Disaster Response Force teams trained to tackle chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear attacks as well as disasters like earthquakes and drowning incidents, have been deployed in Ayodhya ahead of the consecration ceremony. NDRF Director General Atul Karwal told PTI that the teams are undertaking continuous familiarisation exercises to respond to any contingency.

The Ram Lalla idol was revealed on Friday *PHOTO: PTI*

PM sleeping on floor

As part of his special religious practise for 11 days in the run up to the 'Pran Pratishtha' at the Ram temple, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been sleeping over a blanket on the floor and drinking only coconut water, sources said on Friday. He is always doing "gau-pooja", feeding cows and has been engaged in various forms of 'daan'.

Ambani, Bachhan top invitees

Billionaire Mukesh Ambani and his family as well as Bollywood superstar Amitabh Bachchan are among those who feature in a select state guest list of invitees to the consecration of the Ram temple next week. While about 8,000 people are in the long list of invitees, the select list features just a few hundred people. *—PTI*

LASHBACK!

Moitra vacates govt residence after HC junks her plea for stay

NEW DELHI, 19 JAN

Expelled Lok Sabha MP Mahua Moitra on Friday vacated her government bungalow here, a day after the Delhi High Court dismissed her plea for a stay on eviction proceedings.

The former TMC MP's counsel Shadan Farasat said that house number 9B on Telegraph Lane was vacated by 10am this morning before the authorities arrived. "No eviction took place," the counsel told reporters.

The Directorate of Estates (DoE), which comes under the Union Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry, in the morning sent a team to get the bungalow vacated and the area around it was barricaded. Earlier this week, the DoE issued an eviction notice to Moitra.

"The possession of the bungalow has officially been handed over to the Directorate of Estates. We are assessing if there is any damage to the property," an official said.

Moitra failed to get any relief from the Delhi High Court which refused to stay the DoE notice and asked her to vacate the government bungalow.

Justice Girish Kathpalia said no specific rule has been brought before the court which dealt with the eviction of MPs from government accommodation after they cease to be lawmakers. The TMC leader, who was expelled from the Lok Sabha on 8 December last year, was earlier asked to vacate the house by 7 Januaryafter her allotment was cancelled.

On 8 January, the DoE issued a notice seeking her reply within three days as to why she had not vacated her government accommodation. Another notice was also issued to her on 12 January.

On 4 January, Delhi High Court asked the TMC leader to approach the DoE with a request to allow her to continue to occupy the government accommodation. Moitra was held guilty of "unethical conduct" and expelled from Lok Sabha on 8 December for allegedly accepting gifts from businessman Darshan Hiranandani and sharing her user ID and password of the Parliament website with him. *—PTI*

SC fines lawyer Rs 1L for plea against RaGa

NEW DELHI, 19 JAN

The Supreme Court on Friday took a stern view on the filing of "frivolous" petitions and dismissed with a cost of Rs 1 lakh a plea seeking the quashing of a7 August, 2023, notification that restored the Lok Sabha membership of Congress leader Rahul Gandhi.

The Lok Sabha notification restored the membership of Rahul Gandhi following an apex court order staying his conviction in a 2019 defamation case over his 'Modi' surname remark.

The top court had on 4 August, 2023, stayed his conviction in the defamation case. Gandhi represents Wayanad in the Lower House of Parliament.

The plea filed by Lucknow-based Ashok Pandey came up for hearing before a bench of Justices B R Gavai and Sandeep Mehta.

The bench observed that Pandey had not appeared before it despite the matter being called twice for hearing.

The bench noted that the top court had dismissed those petitions with costs of Rs 5 lakh and Rs 1 lakh respectively.

The petitioner had arrayed the Lok Sabha Speaker, the Union of India, the Election Commission of India and Rahul Gandhi as respondents in the plea. *—PTI*

One nation, one election against basic structure: Kharge

NEW DELHI, 19 JAN

Congress on Friday opposed the "undemocratic" idea of holding simultaneous elections in the country and said it goes against the guarantees of federalism and the basic structure of Constitution.

Congress head Mallikarjun Kharge demanded the idea be abandoned and the high-powered committee formed to study it be dissolved. In a letter to the Secretary of the committee on one nation, one election, he requested former president Ram Nath Kovind, who heads the panel, "not to allow his persona and the office of the former president of India to be abused". *—PTI*

5 killed, 1 injured in Odisha accident

BERHAMPUR, 19 JAN

Five people were killed and one person was critically injured in a head-on collision between a scooter and a motorcycle in Odisha's Ganjam, police said on Friday morning.

The accident happened at Kesharipatna near Sorada on Thursday night, they said, adding that three people each were travelling on the two two-wheelers.

The accident is likely to have happened due to low visibility because of dense fog, they said.

The deceased were identified as Srikant Gouda of Ashurabandh, Manoj Dakua of Dulada, Mahendra Nayak of Gopalpur Sashan, Jayant Badatya of Sorada and Rajani Gouda of Sana Sorada. Except for Rajani, who was 43, all were between 30 and 35.

While four people died on the spot, Jayant succumbed to his injuries on the way to the MKCG Medical College and Hospital, police said.

The condition of the sole survivor of the accident was critical, they said.—*PTI*

Dense fog engulfs parts of Delhi, 22 trains delayed

NEW DELHI, 19 JAN

The national capital on Friday recorded a minimum temperature of 7.1 degrees Celsius, a notch below the season average, the weather department said.

Dense fog conditions prevailed in parts of the city with the Palam Observatory near the Indira Gandhi International Airport recording a visibility level of 50 metres at 5.30am.According to the Indian Railways, 22 Delhi-bound trains were delayed by one to six hours due to fog.Very dense fog is when visibility is between 0 and 50 metres, between 51 and 200 metres is dense, between 201 and 500 metres moderate, and between 501 and 1,000 metres shallow.

According to the data by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), the overall Air Quality Index (AQI) at 9 am stood at 347.The relative humidity at 8.30 am was 95 per cent, bulletin said.—*PTI*

Andhra Pradesh kicks off caste census on Friday

AMARAVATI, 19 JAN

The Andhra Pradesh government on Friday kicked off its comprehensive caste census to enumerate all communities in the state.

Information and Public Relations (I & PR) Minister C Srinivasa Venugopala Krishna said the census is scheduled for 10 days from 19 January."The comprehensive caste census is scheduled for 10 days in one phase and if needed, it will be extended by four or five days," Krishna told PTI.

The Minister noted that volunteers will visit each and every home to collect the caste details, which will be relayed to the village secretariat system.Andhra Pradesh becomes the second state after Bihar to take up the caste census.—*PTI*

Councillor throws slipper at municipality head

JAIPUR, 18 JAN

A woman councillor supported by the BJP allegedly threw a slipper at Merta municipality chairman Gautam Tak during a meeting of the municipal body in Rajasthan's Nagaur on Thursday, officials said.

Another BJP councillor allegedly threw a garland at the municipal chairman during the meeting, they said.Tak said that the meeting was called to pass the 2024-25 budget and other development works for the city.Independent councillor Shobha Lahoti, who is supported by the BJP, allegedly threw slippers at the municipal chairman during the meeting attended by BJP MLA Laxman Ram.

Tak said the disruption was created to stall the city's budget. He said that a case has been registered against both the councilors at Merta City Police Station. He said that the meeting will be called again after seven days. Merta City police station officer Pramod Kumar Sharma said that a case has been registered.—*PTI*

No life jackets, flimsy boats killed 14 in Guj

Manager of recreation zone, two held for culpable homicide

VADODARA, 19 JAN

The Gujarat police have arrested three people for culpable homicide not amounting to murder in connection with the boat tragedy near Vadodara that killed 12 students and two teachers, an official said on Friday.

Eighteen students and two teachers were rescued from the boat capsize in Harni lake on the outskirts of Vadodara city on Thursday. The students were on a picnic at the time. In his complaint, VMC engineer Rajesh Chauhan said the firm, its owners, managers and boat operators indulged in criminal negligence on several counts, be it non-maintenance of boats or not keeping adequate number of life-saving equipment and life jackets.

It was also revealed that only a few students were given life jackets and no instructions were given to them, as per the complaint.

People gather during a rescue and search operation after a boat overturned in a lake, in Vadodara **PHOTO: PTI**

The tragedy had prompted the police to register an FIR under sections 304 (culpable homicide not amounting to murder) and 308 (attempt to commit culpable homicide) of the Indian Penal Code against 18 people, including the partners of Kotia Projects, which was given the contract to run Harni Lake Zone by the civic body.

"We have already arrested the manager of the Harni Lake Zone, Shantilal Solanki, and two boat operators – Nayan Gohil and Ankit. Efforts are on to nab other culprits.

Tweleve school students and two women teachers have lost their lives in the incident. Rescue operation in the lake ended on Thursday night," said Deputy Commissioner of Police Panna Momaya.

Meanwhile, some of the families performed the last rites of their children, who died in the boat tragedy, late on Thursday night with teary eyes.

As per the FIR, Kotia Projects was given the contract to operate and maintain Harni Lake Zone, a recreation hub, in 2017 by the Vadodara Municipal Corporation (VMC).Gujarat Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel had visited the site late on Thursday evening and toured Janvi Hospital and state-run SSG Hospital to meet survivors and kin of the deceased.Gujarat Chief Minister announced compensation of Rs 4 lakh to the kin of those who have died and Rs 50,000 to the injured.Patel also monitored the rescue operation that was being carried out by personnel from the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) and other agencies. —*PTI*

OUT FOR 50 DAYS

Gurmeet Ram Rahim gets 9th parole in 4yrs

CHANDIGARH, 19 JAN

Dera Sacha Sauda chief and rape convict Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh has been granted 50-day parole, official sources said on Friday.

The parole comes two months after the Sirsa-headquartered sect chief had walked out of the Sunaria jail in Haryana's Rohtak district on November 21 last year after he was granted a 21-day furlough -- his third temporary release from jail in 2023.

During his temporary release period, Singh will go to the Dera Sacha Sauda Ashram in Barnawa in Uttar Pradesh's Baghpat.

Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh **PHOTO: PTI**

Singh is serving a 20-year jail term for raping two of his disciples.

The Dera chief had walked out of the Sunaria jail on a 30-day parole on July 30, 2023, while he was granted a 40-day parole in January last year as well.

In October 2022 too, he was granted a 40-day parole.

Before that, he had come out of prison on a month-long parole in June 2022. Besides, he was granted a three-week furlough on 7 February, 2022.

In 2021, the Dera chief, along with four others, was also convicted for hatching a conspiracy to kill Ranjit Singh, a Dera manager.

—*PTI*

India sets gender equity alliance

DAVOS, 19 JAN

India on Thursday announced here a new alliance for global good, gender equity and equality, on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting, with the WEF Founder and Chairman Klaus Schwab offering to partner this initiative with full support.

The announcement was made at an India Reception on the sidelines of the WEF Annual Meeting, hosted by apex industry chamber CII and attended by union ministers Smriti Irani and Hardeep Singh Puri as well as WEF Founder and Executive Chairman Klaus Schwab, among others.

The idea of this alliance emerged from the G20 Leaders' Declaration and India's abiding commitment to the cause of women-led development as propounded by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Women and Child Development Minister Smriti Irani said.

As a follow-up to the activities of the Engagement Group and initiatives under the G20 framework, the Business 20, Women 20 and G20 EMPOWER, this alliance aims to take forward the commitments of the G20 leaders for the benefit of the larger global community.

Irani also congratulated WEF for being a very strong support to India.

"Prime Minister Modi has not only given a high growth rate and contained inflation but has also ensured food security to 800 million Indian citizens and also supported people overseas. —*PTI*

HC issues summons to 'Animal' creator on OTT release

NEW DELHI, 19 JAN

The Delhi High Court has issued summons to Super Cassettes and Netflix on a plea by Cine 1 Studios, a co-producer of Bollywood film "Animal", seeking to restrain the release of the movie on digital streaming platforms and its satellite broadcast.

The movie, directed by Sandeep Reddy Vanga, was released in theatres on December 1, 2023 and is set to be released on Netflix on 26 January.

The high court issued summons to Super Cassettes Industries Pvt Ltd, a co-producer of the film, and Cluver Max Entertainment Pvt Ltd (formerly known as Sony Pictures Networks Ltd) with whom an agreement was signed for granting of satellite rights of the film.

Ranbir Kapoor **PHOTO: PTI**

Justice Sanjeev Narula said the three defendants shall also file affidavits of admission or denial of the documents produced by the plaintiff, without which their written statements will not be taken on record."Thus, let the plaint be registered as a suit. Issue summons," the High Court said in its order passed on Thursday.

While Cine 1 Studios Pvt Ltd claimed a breach of agreement and said not paid a single penny, Super Cassettes contended Rs 2.6 crore was paid to plaintiff. —*PTI*

Nayanthara **PHOTO: PTI**

Nayanthara apologises with 'Jai Shree Ram'

NEW DELHI, 19 JAN

Actor Nayanthara has offered sincere and heartfelt apology over her latest Tamil film "Annapoorani", a week after the makers were accused of hurting religious sentiments and the movie was pulled from streaming service Netflix.

In an Instagram post on Thursday night, the "Jawan" star said the film was made to "uplift and inspire, not to cause distress".

"Jai Shri Ram. I am writing this note with a heavy heart and a genuine desire to address the recent turn of events concerning our film, 'Annapoorani'. Crafting 'Annapoorani' was not just a cinematic endeavour but a heartfelt pursuit of inspiring resilience and instilling the spirit of never giving up.

"It aimed to mirror life's journey, where we learn that obstacles can be overcome with sheer willpower... In our sincere attempt to share a positive message, we may have inadvertently caused hurt," Nayanthara wrote. —*PTI*

- Actor Nayanthara has offered sincere and heartfelt apology over her latest Tamil film "Annapoorani", after makers were accused hurting religious sentiments

ED raids Chennai construction firm in laundering case

CHENNAI, 19 JAN

The Enforcement Directorate on Friday raided multiple premises in Chennai as part of a money laundering investigation involving a city-based civil construction and infrastructure company, its promoters and linked persons, official sources said. The probe by the central agency was initiated after taking cognisance of an FIR filed by the central crime branch (CCB) of Greater Chennai Police against Ocean Lifespaces India Private Limited, its MD and CEO SK Peter, some directors and others. About six-seven locations in and around Chennai city are being covered by ED officials under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), the sources said. The CCB FIR was filed last year on the complaint of a former director of the company, B Sriram, who alleged he was "cheated" by the promoters and later he also moved the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) challenging his removal from the board of the company. The company promoters and directors subsequently moved the Madras High Court seeking quashing of the police FIR. The court transferred the probe from the CCB to the crime branch CID of the state after allegations of threat and coercion were made by the company against CCB officials to settle the matter. —*PTI*

- The probe by the central agency was initiated after taking cognisance of an FIR filed by the central crime branch (CCB) of Greater Chennai Police against Ocean Lifespaces India Private Limited

PHOTO: PTI

FOG BLINDS NORTH

A milkman walks along the Jammu & Kashmir National Highway amid dense fog during a cold winter morning **PHOTO: PTI**

Commuters move through the dense fog on a cold winter morning, in Amritsar **PHOTO: ANI**

Delhi witnessed unprecedented fog on Sunday and visibility fluctuated for several hours, at times dropping to zero between 5am to 9am **PHOTO: PTI**

SC mulls if nuns would pay taxes

NEW DELHI, 19 JAN

The Supreme Court has agreed to examine an important legal question whether nuns and priests, working as teachers in government-aided Christian missionary schools, are entitled to income tax exemption.

A bench comprising Chief Justice DY Chandrachud and Justices JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra on Thursday took note of the submissions of senior advocate Arvind Datar that the plea of several dioceses and congregations from Tamil Nadu and Kerala on the issue needed an urgent hearing.

The bench agreed to consider listing the plea, which raised the issue whether the income of nuns and priests, working as teachers, can be subjected to income tax.

In December, 2014, the Income Tax department asked the educational authorities to effect TDS (tax deducted at source) from persons working as teachers.The appeals have been filed in the top court after the high courts did not agree to the challenge raised by nearly 100 dioceses and congregations from Tamil Nadu and Kerala.The plea said the income of nuns and priests become the income of the congregation which runs the school and that these teachers personally do not acquire the money paid as salaries. —*PTI*

Delhi flights to be suspended by 2hrs

NEW DELHI, 19 JAN

There will be no flight arrivals or departures at the Delhi airport from 10.20am to 12.45pm every day till 26 January in connection with the Republic Day preparations and celebrations, according to an official.

The NOTAM (Notice to Airmen) issued by the Airports Authority of India (AAI) has been revised to introduce the new restrictions.

Earlier, the curbs were in place only for non-scheduled flights with certain exceptions.

From 19 to 26 January, no flights would be arriving or departing from the Delhi airport between 10.20am to 12.45pm, the official said on Friday.

- From 19 to 26 January, no flights would be arriving or departing from the Delhi airport between 10.20am to 12.45pm

Generally, a NOTAM (Notice to Airmen) is a notice with information that is essential to personnel involved in flight operations.

Airspace curbs in the national capital will be in place from Friday (19 January) till Monday (January 29) in connection with the Republic Day preparations and celebrations.

—*PTI*

'Almost all states implementing NEP'

HYDERABAD, 19 JAN

Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan on Friday said that almost all states are implementing the National Education Policy 2020.

He said that even the states that seem reluctant are indeed implementing the policy although they are using different terminology."I am happy. Let them be satisfied with using different terminology. But, with full responsibility I can say almost all states are implementing National Education Policy 2020 which is a very philosophical and historical document," he told reporters when asked about the present status of NEP 2020 and the number of states implementing it.

He was speaking at IIT-Hyderabad after inaugurating IInvenTiv 2024, —*PTI*

HOUSE OF HORROR

Stripped & beaten; tales of ophanage kids in Indore

INDORE, 19 JAN

Minor girls at an Indore "orphanage" narrated tales of abuse and alleged horrifying ways of punishment, including branding with hot tongs, hanging them upside down and forced to inhale smoke from burning red chillies, prompting the local administration to seal the facility and the police to file an FIR against five women.As the shocking tales, recounted by the inmates before a Child Welfare Committee (CWC), surfaced an FIR (first information report) was registered against five women associated with the facility for allegedly ill-treating children in the name of punishment, a police official said on Friday.The facility, described by officials as an "orphanage", was sealed by the local administration. However, the NGO running the children's facility said it was a hostel and not an orphanage, and filed a habeas corpus petition in the Madhya Pradesh High Court challenging the administration's action.It also denied all allegations mentioned in the FIR filed on the basis of a complaint by the local CWC.The administration sealed the facility, "Vatsalyapuram", located in the Vijayanagar area on 12 January for illegal operation and shifted the inmates, girls aged between four and 14 years, to the state-run Child Protection Home and another institution, the official said.The girl inmates told the Child Welfare Committee (CWC) that they were tortured in the name of punishment in the premises, he said.In the FIR lodged on the night of 17 January, it was mentioned a four-year-old girl was beaten up for wearing dirty clothes, locked in the bathroom for several hours and not given food for two days. Two children were branded with hot tongs at the hands of a minor girl and one girl was being stripped. —*PTI*

PHOTO: PIXBAY

GETTING READY

Ram Path is now a hotspot of devotees in Uttar Pradesh ahead of the consecration ceremony of Ram Janmabhoomi temple on 22 January **PHOTO: PTI**

Meiteis-Kukis: A divide like no other in Manipur

In the pitch darkness of a quiet night, our bus was stopped by a couple of men who got in, took a quick look, ensured there were no Meiteis and got off. As we let out a collective sigh of relief, the realisation hit anew -- the divide in Manipur is complete, perhaps like none other.

Away from the headlines about violence in the northeast state, the schism in Manipur between the Kukis and Meitei communities is a lived reality, felt every minute of every day. The acrimony has been well known since the outbreak of hostilities last May, but a trip this week to cover the Congress' Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra made me understand how deep it actually runs.

On the night of 16 January, our bus full of journalists and a Congress representative was headed from Kohima to Imphal -- a distance of about 140 km that takes over five hours due to the condition of the road -- was stopped twice at 'check posts' manned by the Kukis.

The first time, the Kuki men got off when they realised we were all media personnel headed to Imphal to catch a flight the next day. There were some worries that the men could have been armed.We were stopped again soon after.The second 'check post' was guarded by Kuki women who stopped the bus and asked Lekha Nair, the woman representative of the Congress, to make an entry of the names of the people on the bus. A few journalists also got down to help her out.

Just then, a man came running seeing the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra flag on the bus, put up to allow the bus 'smooth passage' on a route not considered safe these days -- ever since May in fact when violence broke out between the Kuki and Meitei communities and the country woke up to the ethnic tension in the state.

The man apologised on behalf of the Kuki women, saying they did not mean to stop journalists and had mistaken them for "someone else". My one thought was - what if one of us was the "someone else"? Yes, they would have been taken off the bus and then what?

Violence in Manipur which claimed ober 180 lives erupted on 3 May last year after a 'Tribal Solidarity March' was organised in the hill districts to protest against the Meitei community's demand for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status **PHOTO: PTI**

The back-to-back checks only reinforced what many of us had been feeling since January 14 when we reached Manipur to cover the launch of the Rahul Gandhi-led yatra.The next day, the yatra moved to Kohima in Nagaland from Imphal. Several Kukis were seen lined up with banners seeking justice and highlighting the "atrocities" on them.

The stark divide became even more apparent as our bus moved into Kuki areas of Kangpokpi district under which falls the village of B Phainom where two women were paraded naked last May, a video of which went viral and led to massive outrage across the country. Banners stating that 'Meitei products not allowed' and "outsiders" not allowed between 5 pm-6 am were seen outside Kuki villages, a reminder if any were needed of the yawning gulf between the two communities.

The journey back to Imphal, where some of us had to return to take a flight to Delhi was dramatic. A little scary. And not just because of the checkpoints.

My taxi driver who brought me back from Chiephobozou to Kohima had told me that it would be difficult to get a cab or any public transport to Imphal.

I asked my colleague, if he would be able to undertake the journey.He agreed that we will not be able to undertake the journey alone and it was best that we join other journalists.

I called the Congress coordinator to ask where their bus was and luckily it was just a few minutes away from Kohima.They agreed to pick us up from the hotel.The internet was patchy to say the least and we struggled to send our stories on the press conference to the Delhi desk, working on our mobile phone and transmitting what we had written whenever the signal came back on.

After that brief exchange with members of the community, no one talked too much, perhaps internalising what we had just witnessed.

It had dawned on everyone that what we had witnessed was a divide not just physical but also of hearts and it was indeed a sad realisation.

As we entered the all-woman market where we could buy shawls and handicrafts, we were met with a poster in bold, saying 'Go Back Kuki Refugees'. There was another seeking support for Meiteis' inclusion in the Scheduled Tribe list. We boarded our flight to Delhi that evening. As my colleague and I sat in the lounge waiting for our delayed flight, we reflected on the dramatic two days that had been.

And we both had just one inference -- "this is a divide like no other". *—PTI*

LETTERS

Write to us at salar@salar.news

SALAR سالار

Climate change could reduce life expectancy by half a year

Climate change may take six months off the average human lifespan, according to a study which found that women and individuals in developing nations are disproportionately affected.

The study, published recently in the journal PLOS Climate, evaluated average temperature, rainfall, and life expectancy data from 191 countries from 1940–2020.

In addition to measuring the isolated impacts of temperature and rainfall, the researchers designed a first-of-its-kind composite climate change index, which combines the two variables to gauge the overarching severity of climate change.

Results indicate that in isolation, a global temperature increase of 1 degree Celsius is associated with an average human life expectancy decrease of approximately 0.44 years, or about six months and one week.

A 10-point increase in the composite climate change index—which accounts for both temperature and rainfall—is expected to decrease the average life expectancy by six months, the researchers said.

Women and individuals in developing nations are disproportionately affected, the Study revealed.

"The global threat posed by climate change to the well-being of billions underscores the urgent need to address it as a public health crisis, as revealed by this study," said Amit Roy from Shahjalal University of Science and Technology in Bangladesh and The New School for Social Research, US.

The study emphasises that "mitigation efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and proactive initiatives are essential to safeguard life expectancy and protect the health of populations worldwide," Roy added.

According to the study, women and individuals in developing nations are disproportionately affected by the change **PHOTO: PTI**

> "The global threat posed by climate change to the well-being of billions underscores the urgent need to address it as a public health crisis, as revealed by this study," said Amit Roy from Shahjalal University of Science and Technology in Bangladesh and The New School for Social Research, US

Temperature and rainfall—two telltale signals of climate change—cause myriad public health concerns, from the acute and direct (eg, natural disasters like flooding and heat waves) to the indirect yet equally devastating (e.g., respiratory and mental illnesses), the researchers said.

While impacts like these are observable and well documented, existing research has not established a direct link between climate change and life expectancy, they claimed.

The team is hopeful that the composite climate change index will standardise the global conversation about climate change, become a usable metric for the nonscientific public and encourage collaboration and even friendly competition among countries to combat the impacts of climate change.

Mitigating greenhouse gas emissions and adapting to a changing environment are of particular importance, the researchers said.

To complement this large-scale approach, they suggest localised future studies that consider specific severe weather events - for instance, wildfires, tsunamis, and floods - the impacts of which cannot be fully captured through analysing temperature and rainfall alone.

—PTI

According to study, a global temperature increase of 1 degree C is associated with an average human life expectancy decrease of approximately 0.44 years, or about six months and one week **PHOTO: PTI**

How AI threatens free speech, and what must be done about it

Headlines about the threats of artificial intelligence (AI) tend to be full of killer robots, or fears that when they're not on killing sprees, these same robots will be hoovering up human jobs. But a serious danger which gets surprisingly little media attention is the impact these new technologies are likely to have on freedom of expression.

And, in particular, how they're able to undermine some of the most foundational legal tenets that protect free speech.

Every time a new communications technology sweeps through society, it disrupts the balance that has previously been struck between social stability and individual liberty.

We're currently living through this. Social media has made new forms of community networking, surveillance and public exposure possible, which have led to increased political polarisation, the rise of global populism and an epidemic of online harassment and bullying.

Amid all this, free speech has become a totemic issue in the culture wars, with its status both boosted and threatened by the societal forces unleashed by social media platforms.

Yet free speech debates tend to be caught up with arguments about "cancel culture" and the "woke" mindset. This risks overlooking the impact technology is having on how freedom of expression laws actually work.

In particular, the way that AI gives governments and tech companies the ability to censor expression with increasing ease, and at great scale and speed. This is a serious issue that I explore in my new book, The Future of Language.

The delicate balance of free speech

Some of the most important protections for free speech in liberal democracies such as the UK and the US rely on technicalities in how the law responds to the real-life actions of everyday citizens.

A key element of the current system relies on the fact that we, as autonomous individuals, have the unique ability to transform our ideas into words and communicate these to others. This may seem a rather unremarkable point. But the way the law currently works is based on this simple assumption about human social behaviour, and it's something that AI threatens to undermine.

Every time a new communications technology sweeps through society, it disrupts the balance that has previously been struck between social stability and individual liberty **PHOTO: PIXABAY**

Free speech protections in many liberal societies rule against the use of "prior restraint" – that is, blocking an utterance before it's been expressed.

The government, for instance, should not be able to prevent a newspaper from publishing a particular story, although it can prosecute it for doing so after publication if it thinks the story is breaking any laws. The use of prior restraint is already widespread in countries such as China, which have very different attitudes to the regulation of expression.

This is significant because, despite what tech libertarians such as Elon Musk may assert, no society in the world allows for absolute freedom of speech. There's always a balance to be struck between protecting people from the real harm that language can cause (for example by defaming them), and safeguarding people's right to express conflicting opinions and criticise those in power. Finding the right balance between these is one of the most challenging decisions a society is faced with.

AI and prior restraint

Given that so much of our communication today is mediated by technology, it is now extremely easy for AI assistance to be used to enact prior restraint, and to do so at great speed and massive scale. This would create circumstances in which that basic human ability to turn ideas into speech could be compromised, as and when a government (or social media exec) wishes it to be.

The UK's recent Online Safety Act, for instance, as well plans in the US and Europe to use "upload filtering" (algorithmic tools for blocking certain content from being uploaded) as a way of screening for offensive or illegal posts, all encourage social media platforms to use AI to censor at source.

The rationale given for this is a practical one. With such a huge quantity of content being uploaded every minute of every day, it becomes extremely challenging for teams of humans to monitor everything. AI is a fast and far less expensive alternative.

But it's also automated, unable to bring real-life experience to bear, and its decisions are rarely subject to public scrutiny. The consequences of this are that AI-driven filters can often lean towards censoring content which is neither illegal or offensive.

Free speech as we understand it today relies on specific legal processes of protection that have developed over centuries. It's not an abstract idea, but one grounded in very particular social and legal practices.

Legislation that encourages content regulation by automation effectively dismisses these processes as technicalities. In doing so, it risks jeopardising the entire institution of free speech.

Free speech will always be an idea sustained by ongoing debate. There's never a settled formula for defining what should be outlawed and what not. This is why determining what counts as acceptable and unacceptable needs to take place in open society and be subject to appeal.

While there are indications that some governments are beginning to acknowledge this in planning for the future of AI, it needs to be centre stage in all such plans.

Whatever role AI may play in helping to monitor online content, it mustn't constrain our ability to argue among ourselves about what sort of society we're trying to create.

Courtesy, The Conversation

PHOTO: ANI

Pak PM forms panel for smooth conduct of 8 February polls

ISLAMABAD, 19 JAN

Pakistan's caretaker Prime Minister Anwaarul Haq Kakar has constituted a seven-member committee mandated with ensuring the smooth conduct of the February 8 general elections already impaired by allegations of "pre-poll rigging", according to a media report. According to a notification issued by the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) on Thursday, interim Minister for Communications, Railways, and Maritime Affairs Shahid Ashraf Tarar has been named as the head of the committee. The other members include the interior secretary, four provincial chief secretaries as well as any other co-opted individual desired by the committee. The committee will have the mandate to oversee the security arrangements for polls. *—PTI*

10 dead after landslide buries house in Philippines

DAVAO, 19 JAN

A landslide set off by days of heavy rain buried a house where people were holding Christian prayers in the southern Philippines, killing at least 10 people, including five children, officials said on Friday. Three more bodies were found on Friday, after the search was paused mid-afternoon Thursday due to the risk of another landslide. People living near the village were ordered to evacuate due to fears of more land- and mud-slides due to intermittent downpours, Monkayo Mayor Manuel Zamora said. Days of heavy rains also flooded low-lying villages and displaced more than 36,000 people in Davao de Oro and three other provinces, the Office of Civil Defense said. The weather began to clear on Friday in some areas. *—AP*

Trump's plea to hold Smith for contempt denied

WASHINGTON, 19 JAN

The federal judge overseeing the 2020 election interference case against Donald Trump on Thursday rejected his lawyers' bid to hold special counsel Jack Smith's team in contempt for actions prosecutors took after the judge put the case on hold. But the judge said no further "substantive" court filings should be submitted without permission. The former president's lawyers had accused prosecutors of "outrageous conduct" for turning over to the defense thousands of pages of evidence and filing a motion after the judge paused the case while Trump appeals his presidential immunity claim. The defence said prosecutors were violating a court order that put the case on hold so Trump can pursue his claim in higher courts. *—AP*

Days after attacks, Pak & Iran agree on closer security co-op

This belies fears of conflict escalation after tiff between 2 nations

ISLAMABAD, 19 JAN

Pakistan and Iran on Friday agreed to the spirit of "mutual trust and cooperation" and the need for closer cooperation on security issues as the two sides began to pick threads of tattered ties following their tit-for-tat missile strikes in each other's territory.

Foreign Minister Jalil Abbas Jilani spoke with his Iranian counterpart Hossein Amir-Abdollahian and expressed Pakistan's readiness to work with Iran on "all issues based on the spirit of mutual trust and cooperation", Pakistan's Foreign Office said in a statement.

"He (Jilani) underscored the need for closer cooperation on security issues," said the statement issued after the two ministers spoke over the telephone.

The positive development came after Pakistan conducted "precision military strikes" against what it called "terrorist hideouts" in Iran's Siestan-Balochistan province that killed 9 people on Thursday. The attack was seen as retaliation to Iranian missile and drone attacks on Tuesday, which targeted two bases of the Sunni Baloch militant group Jaish al-Adl in Pakistan's unruly Balochistan province.

The positive development came after Pakistan conducted "precision military strikes" against what it called "terrorist hideouts" in Iran's Siestan-Balochistan *PHOTO: PTI*

Earlier, Jilani and his Turkish counterpart Hakan Fidan discussed the "ongoing developments between Pakistan and Iran", the Foreign Office said.

He told Fidan that the military strikes were aimed at terrorist camps inside Iran and added that Pakistan has no interest or desire for escalation.

Also, officials of the foreign ministries from Iran and Pakistan exchanged goodwill messages, belying fears of escalation and showing that the tiff between the two neighbours was cooling off sooner than it erupted two days ago.

Foreign Office Spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Baloch shared an exchange of messages between Additional Foreign Secretary Rahim Hayat Qureshi and his Iranian counterpart Seyed Rasoul Mousavi on her X handle, saying: "Some positive exchanges."

In an X post today, the Foreign Office additional secretary responded to his Iranian counterpart's letter saying he reciprocated the sentiments of "dear brother Seyed Rasoul Mousavi."He said Pakistan and Iran have fraternal relations and the countries need to move forward to resolve all issues through positive dialogue.

He said that it is important to restore trust and confidence that has always defined bilateral relations between the two countries. "Our common challenges including terrorism require coordinated action," he added.

Mousavi said he believed that Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs is the endpoint of the prevailing tensions between the two countries. "Leaders and high officials of both countries know that only terrorists and enemies of both countries benefit from the existing tension between the two neighbouring countries," he wrote on X in Persian. *—PTI*

AMID HIGH GLOBAL TENSIONS

N Korea tests 'underwater nuke weapons'

North Korea's military conducted the test in response to the US, South Korean, and Japanese naval drills *PHOTO: BBC NEWS*

SEOUL, 19 JAN

- The alleged drone test came days after North Korean leader Kim Jong-un declared he would scrap his country's long-standing goal of a peaceful unification with South Korea

North Korea said on Friday it had tested a purported underwater nuclear attack drone in response to a combined naval exercise between South Korea and the United States and Japan this week. This comes as it continues to blame its rivals for raising tensions in the region.

The alleged drone test came days after North Korean leader Kim Jong-un declared he would scrap his country's long-standing goal of a peaceful unification with South Korea and that his country would rewrite its constitution to define South Korea as its most hostile foreign adversary.

Tensions on the Korean Peninsula are at their highest point in years with Kim accelerating weapons demonstrations and threatening nuclear conflict and the US and its Asian allies responding by strengthening their combined military exercises.

North Korea's alleged nuclear attack drone, which the North first tested last year, is among a broad range of weapon systems demonstrated in recent years as Kim expands his arsenal of nuclear-capable weapons. South Korea's military has insisted the North has exaggerated the capabilities of the drone, which is supposedly designed to carry out strikes on enemy vessels and ports.

The North's military said it conducted the test in the country's eastern waters in response to the US, South Korean, and Japanese naval drills, which wrapped up its three-day run on Wednesday in waters south of Jeju island.

"Our Army's underwater nuke-based countering posture is being further rounded off and its various maritime and underwater responsive actions will continue to deter the hostile military maneuvers of the navies of the US and its allies," the North's Defence Ministry said in a statement. *—AP*

'US strikes on Houthis have not stopped Red Sea attacks'

Biden administration also has put the Houthis back on its list of specially designated global terrorists. *PHOTO: PTI*

WASHINGTON, 19 JAN

US forces on Thursday conducted a fifth strike against Iranian-backed Houthi rebel military sites in Yemen. President Joe Biden acknowledged that the American and British bombardment had yet to stop the militants' attacks on vessels in the Red Sea that have disrupted global shipping.

The latest strikes destroyed two Houthi anti-ship missiles that "were aimed into the southern Red Sea and prepared to launch," US Central Command said in a statement posted to X. They were conducted by Navy fighter aircraft, the Pentagon said.

Biden said the US would continue the strikes, even though so far they have not stopped the Houthis from continuing to harass commercial and military vessels.

Biden's comments followed another significant round of strikes on Wednesday, when the US military fired another wave of ship- and submarine-launch missile strikes against 14 Houthi-controlled sites. The strikes were launched from the Red Sea and hit 14 missiles that the command also had deemed an imminent threat.

His administration also has put the Houthis back on its list of specially designated global terrorists. *—AP*

Only a ceasefire deal can bring hostages home: Source

Jerusalem, 19 Jan

Former army chief Gadi Eisenkot said that only a ceasefire deal can win the release of dozens of hostages held by Hamas in Gaza and that those claiming they can be freed through military pressure are spreading illusions.

Bibi junks US push for state of Palestine

Jerusalem, 19 Jan

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu says he has informed the United States that he opposes the establishment of a Palestinian state as part of any postwar scenario. The announcement exposed the deep divisions that have emerged between the close allies three months into Israel's war against Gaza's Hamas rulers.

Israel bombs university in Gaza

Cairo, 19 Jan

Al-Israa University said that Israeli forces blew up its main campus outside Gaza City. Video footage circulating online, apparently taken by a drone, showed the complex of buildings, about 8 km south of Gaza City, being blown up in a controlled explosion.

320 scribes jailed around world: Report

NEW YORK, 19 JAN

An estimated 320 journalists around the world were imprisoned because of their work toward the end of 2023, according to a report issued Thursday by the Committee to Protect Journalists. They called it a disturbing attempt to smother independent voices.

That's the second-highest number of jailed journalists since the committee began its annual census in 1992. It's down from 367 in 2022, due primarily to the release of many in Iran, either on bail or as they await sentencing, the committee said.

More than a third of the journalists in jail according to the CPJ's 1 December, 2023, census were in China, Myanmar and Belarus, the report said.

Israel is tied with Iran for sixth place, the country's highest ranking ever on CPJ's annual list. Each of the 17 that were held in Israel at the time of the census were Palestinians arrested in the West Bank since the start of the war between Israel and Hamas. *—PTI*

Pope Francis says sexual pleasure is 'a gift from God'

VATICAN CITY, 19 JAN

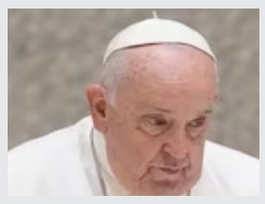
Pope Francis has said that sexual pleasure is "a gift from God" that should be "disciplined with patience."

He also warned against pornography, which he said brought "satisfaction without relationship" and could lead to addiction.

His Vatican address was part of a series of sermons on vices and virtues, focused on what the Pope called "the demon of lust".

It followed criticism by conservative Catholics of his new head of doctrine.

Cardinal Victor Manuel Fernández, who was appointed last July, came under fire for a book he wrote and published in the late 1990s entitled Mystical Passion: Spirituality and Sensuality. The book, which is now out of print, discussed human sexuality and provided detailed descriptions of male and female experiences during orgasms. Speaking to Catholic online publication Crux, Cardinal Fernández said he wrote the book when he was still young and he "certainly would not" write it now. Conservative commentators have called the book "perverse", with one saying it showed Cardinal Fernández was "unfit" to be prefect of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith. The Pope had already tackled the vice of gluttony last week and there was no suggestion that his sermon on lust during Wednesday's general audience was related to criticism of the cardinal.



Pope Francis *PHOTO: AP*

He said that lust "devastates relationships between people", adding that "daily news is enough to document this reality".

"How many relationships that started out in the best way have later become toxic relationships?" he asked. This is not the first time Pope Francis or Cardinal Fernández have drawn the ire of conservative members of the Catholic community. In December, Cardinal Fernández introduced a text, later approved by Pope Francis, detailing guidelines allowing priests to bless same-sex couples relationships that were considered sinful. *—BBC News*

LANKA ARRESTS THOUSANDS IN DRUG RAIDS

COLOMBO, 19 JAN

Sri Lankan authorities have arrested tens of thousands of people in a monthlong crackdown on drugs, and vowed to continue despite UN criticism of possible human rights violations during the "heavy-handed" operation. Since the operation began in December, heavily armed police and military personnel with sniffer dogs have made regular nighttimes raids on homes and search buses, seizing narcotics and arresting suspects who include drug users, local dealers and distributors, and people with records of drug-related arrests. Acting police chief Deshabandu Tennakoon told The Associated Press on Thursday that more than 40,000 people have arrested and questioned during operations conducted jointly by the police and security forces, and 5,000 were ordered detained by the courts. *—AP*

La Kena: Notorious Mexican cartel leader captured

MEXICO CITY, 19 JAN

The leader of a faction of the notorious Gulf Cartel in Mexico has been arrested, local media reports. José Alberto García Vilano, also known as La Kena or Ciclon 19, allegedly leads the violent Los Ciclones cell. His group is accused of kidnapping four US citizens in March last year, killing two of them. Vilano was reportedly captured in a shopping plaza in the city of Monterrey, after information about his whereabouts was leaked to officials. Unverified footage on social media purports t o show Vilano and his associates being marched through a mall by armed police. The four US citizens were kidnapped in the border city of Matamoros, which lies directly across from the Texan town of Brownsville, in the United States. *—BBC NEWS*

Russian oil depot hit in Kyiv's drone attack

KYIV, 19 JAN

A Ukrainian drone struck an oil storage depot in western Russia on Friday, causing a massive blaze, officials said, as Kyiv's forces apparently extended their attacks on Russian soil ahead of the war's two-year anniversary.

Four oil reservoirs with a total capacity of 6,000 cubic m were set on fire after the drone reached Klintsy, a city of some 70,000 people located about 60km from the Ukrainian border, according to the local governor and state news agency Tass.

The strike apparently was the latest in a recently intensified effort by Ukraine to unnerve Russians and undermine President Vladimir Putin's claims that life in Russia is going on as normal before its 17 March presidential election.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has vowed to hit more targets inside Russian border regions this year. Russia's air defences are concentrated in occupied regions of Ukraine, Kyiv officials say, leaving more distant targets inside Russia more vulnerable as Ukrainian forces develop longer-range drones.

The Russian city of Belgorod, also near the Ukrainian border, cancelled its traditional Orthodox Epiphany festivities on Friday due to the threat of Ukrainian drone strikes.

It was the first time major public events were known to have been called off in Russia due to the drone threat. *—AP*

SO CLOSE, YET SO FAR

Japan lander reaches Moon but fate uncertain

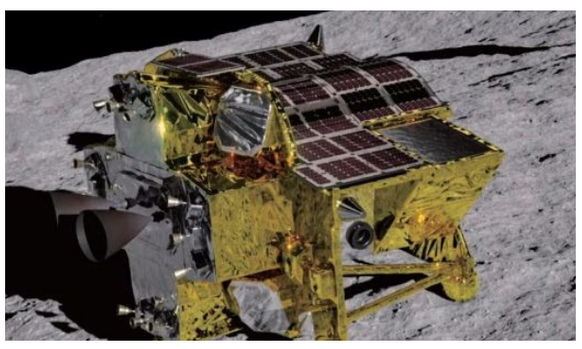
TOKOYO, 19 JAN

Japan's space agency said early Saturday that its spacecraft is on the moon, but is still "checking its status".

The Smart Lander for Investigating Moon, or SLIM, came down onto the lunar surface at around 8.50pm. No astronauts were onboard the spacecraft.

If SLIM landed successfully, Japan would become the fifth country to accomplish the feat after the United States, the Soviet Union, China and India.

As the spacecraft descended, the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency's mission control said that everything was going as planned and later said that SLIM was on the lunar surface. But there was no mention of whether the landing was successful.



If SLIM landed successfully, Japan would become the fifth country to accomplish the feat *PHOTO: JAXA*

SLIM, nicknamed "the Moon Sniper," started its descent at midnight Saturday, and within 15 minutes it was down to about 10 km (six miles) above the lunar surface, according to the space agency, which is known as JAXA. At an altitude of 5km, the lander was in a vertical descent mode, then at 50m above the surface, SLIM was supposed to make a parallel movement to find a safe landing spot, JAXA said.

About a half-hour after its presumed landing, JAXA said that it was still checking the status of the lander.

SLIM, which was aiming to hit a very small target, is a lightweight spacecraft about the size of a passenger vehicle. It was using "pinpoint landing" technology that promises far greater control than any previous moon landing.

While most previous probes have used landing zones about 10km wide, SLIM was aiming at a target of just 100m. The project was the fruit of two decades of work on precision technology by JAXA. The mission's main goal is to test new landing technology that would allow moon missions to land "where we want to, rather than where it is easy to land," JAXA has said. If the landing was a success, the spacecraft will seek clues about the origin of the moon, including analysing minerals with a special camera. *—AP*

America's Moon mission destroyed

Washington, 19 Jan

A US spacecraft launched last week to try to land on the Moon has ended its mission in flames over the Pacific. Peregrine One suffered a propulsion fault that scuppered any prospect of a lunar touch-down and it was commanded to destroy itself instead. *—BBC News*

Rupee rises 7 paise to settle at 83.06 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 19 JAN

The rupee gained 7 paise to settle at 83.06 (provisional) against the US dollar on Friday, tracking robust buying in domestic equity markets and weak American currency overseas.However, strengthening crude oil prices and foreign capital outflows capped the sharp gain in the domestic currency, forex traders said.At the interbank foreign exchange, the domestic currency opened at 83.15 and traded between the peak of 83.06 and the lowest level of 83.16 against the greenback.Local unit finally settled at 83.06 (provisional) against the dollar, registering a gain of 7 paise against its previous close.On Thursday, the rupee settled 1 paisa higher at 83.13 against the US dollar.Rupee appreciated following a positive trend in domestic markets, Anuj Choudhary Research Analyst, Sharekhan by BNP Paribas, said."However, recovery in crude oil prices and FII outflows over the past couple of sessions capped sharp gains."He said the rupee is likely to trade with a slight positive bias on positive global equities and a weak US dollar. *—PTI*

Gold jumps ₹250; silver rallies ₹400

NEW DELHI, 19 JAN

Gold prices jumped by Rs 250 to Rs 63,000 per 10 grams in the national capital on Friday amid a global rally in the precious metal, according to HDFC Securities.The yellow metal had closed at Rs 62,750 per 10 grams in the previous trade.Silver also rallied Rs 400 to Rs 76,000 per kg from Rs 75,600 per kg in the previous close.Snapping its three-day losing streak, spot gold prices (24 carats) in the Delhi markets are trading at Rs 63,000 per 10 grams, up by Rs 250, amid recovery in the overseas markets, Saumil Gandhi, senior analyst of commodities at HDFC Securities, said.In the overseas markets, gold was trading higher at USD 2,027 per ounce, while it had finished at USD 2,010 per ounce in the previous trade.Silver was also marginally higher at USD 22.81 per ounce.Uncertainty surrounding the Middle East conflict is contributing to the safe-haven demand for gold prices. *—PTI*

Akasa Air declares commercial flights from Noida Airport

NOIDA, 19 JAN

Akasa Air on Friday became the second airline to announce commercial flight operations from the upcoming Noida International Airport in Uttar Pradesh. IndiGo was the first airline to announce a tie-up with the greenfield airport, located near the national capital, for commercial services, according to a statement.A partnership agreement was signed between Akasa Air and Noida International Airport in Hyderabad on Friday on the sidelines of industry event 'Wings 2024', the statement said."We are excited to welcome Akasa Air as our airline partner, marking a significant step forward as we progress towards airport opening. This partnership highlights our commitment to strengthen air connectivity in the Delhi-NCR and western Uttar Pradesh," Noida International Airport Chief Executive Officer Christoph Schnellmann said. *—PTI*

MoU worth ₹10Kcr signed with Web Werks: Shinde

MUMBAI, 19 JAN

Maharashtra government has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) worth Rs 10,000 crore with Web Werks for investment in a mega IT/ITES data centre in the state in the next five years, Chief Minister Eknath Shinde's office has said.The MoU was signed in the presence of Shinde in Davos, the CM's office said on X on Thursday night.The investment proposal has the potential to create direct employment for 1,500 people, it said.Earlier, CM Shinde had said that the state had inked MoUs worth Rs 3,53,675 crore at the World Economic Forum in Davos. *—PTI*

Markets bounce back after 3-day losing run

Investors become richer by Rs 4 lakh crore

MUMBAI, 19 JAN

Benchmark Sensex rebounded 496 points while Nifty closed above the 21,600 level on Friday as value buying in heavyweight stocks and a firm trend in global markets helped indices cut short three days of losses.

The 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 496.37 points or 0.70 per cent to settle at 71,683.23.

During the day, it zoomed 708.78 points or 0.99 per cent to 71,895.64.

The Nifty climbed 160.15 points or 0.75 per cent to close at 21,622.40 with 43 of its shares closing in the green and seven in the red.

In the past three days, the BSE benchmark fell by 2.91 per cent, and the Nifty declined 2.87 per cent.

"A 'buy on dips' and encouraging global cues propelled the market's recovery," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services.

"Today's rebound was broad based; however, investors are disappointed and expect moderation in the rally. FIIs persist with risk-off sparked by the likelihood that interest rates may not moderate and domestic earnings growth can slow down as per the initial Q3 results announced," Nair said.

IndusInd Bank, Kotak Mahindra Bank and State Bank of India were the laggards *PHOTO: PTI*

- HDFC Bank extended its losses for the fourth straight day, falling by 1.08 per cent. Stock declined around 10% in four sessions after the release of its third quarter financial results

Among the Sensex firms, Bharti Airtel rose the most by 3.52 per cent. NTPC rose by 3.04 per cent and Tech Mahindra by 2.56 per cent. Mahindra & Mahindra, Tata Steel, UltraTech Cement, Titan, Axis Bank, JSW Steel ICICI Bank and Larsen & Toubro were the major gainers.

IndusInd Bank, Kotak Mahindra Bank and State Bank of India were the laggards.

HDFC Bank extended its losses for the fourth straight day, falling by 1.08 per cent. The stock declined around 10 per cent in the four sessions after the release of its third quarter financial results.

"Firm global cues triggered a gap-up start in Nifty, followed by range bound movement till the end," Ajit Mishra, SVP - Technical Research, Religare Broking Ltd said.

In the broader market, the BSE midcap gauge jumped 1.69 per cent and smallcap index climbed 1.06 per cent.

In Asian markets, Seoul, and Tokyo settled in the green while Shanghai and Hong Kong ended lower.

European markets were trading higher. The US markets ended with gains on Thursday. Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.63 per cent to USD 79.60 a barrel.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 9,901.56 crore on Thursday, according to exchange data. *—PTI*

Forex reserves jump USD 1.63 B to USD 618.9 B

MUMBAI, 19 JAN

India's forex reserves jumped USD 1.634 billion to USD 618.937 billion for the week ended January 12, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) said on Friday.

In the previous reporting week, the overall reserves had declined sharply by USD 5.89 billion to USD 617.3 billion.

The country's forex kitty had reached an all-time high of USD 645 billion in October 2021. The reserves took a hit as the central bank deployed the kitty to defend the rupee amid pressures caused majorly by global developments since last year.For the week ended January 12, the foreign currency assets -- a major component of the reserves -- increased USD 1.859 billion to USD 548.508 billion, the data said.

Expressed in dollar terms, the foreign currency assets include the effect of appreciation or depreciation of non-US units like the euro, pound, and yen held in the foreign exchange reserves.

Gold reserves were down USD 242 million to USD 47.247 billion during the week, the RBI said.

The Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) were up USD 12 million to USD 18.31 billion, the apex bank said. *—PTI*

VAISHNAW AT WEF

India fast paced semiconductor industry: Min

DAVOS, 19 JAN

Ashwini Vaishnaw *PHOTO: PTI*

The first made-in-India chip will be out by December, Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said here, crediting Prime Minister Narendra Modi for developing a very strong semiconductor industry in the country in a short span of time with focus on the entire ecosystem.

Speaking to PTI at the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting 2024, the minister said PM Modi launched a semiconductor policy in January 2022, adding that when he met senior representatives of the industry here, the one thing they all were surprised about was how this much work could be done in such a short time.

"They all appreciated the policy and the fact that PM Modi has always stressed on creating a comprehensive ecosystem because not many countries have this kind of policy and therefore they could not get such success," he said.

The Minister for Communications as well as Electronics and Information Technology said the prime minister has always focussed on developing an ecosystem where there is a lot of focus on talent.

"MoUs (Memoranda of Understanding) with 104 universities are already in place, their course curriculum are being revised, there is a lot of focus on design with a separate investment scheme.

"Many design companies have got the benefit and they are gradually coming up in the value chain. All of this is getting appreciated a lot by companies from the world over," he said.

Giving the example of Macron, Vaishnaw said the way the Macron facility has moved ahead so fast, everyone has been pleasantly surprised. *—PTI*

Action against 3 i-bankers on inflating IPO plans: SEBI

MUMBAI, 19 JAN

SEBI Chairperson Madhabi Puri Buch on Friday said the capital markets regulator has found that three merchant bankers are frequently indulging in inflating subscriptions during share sales, and promised action against them.

Speaking at an annual convention organised by a lobby grouping of investment bankers here, Buch said the Sebi also has data and evidence on "mule accounts", wherein the credentials of an innocent person are used to typically front-run on stocks by those wanting to not leave a trace of trades.

There is also a tendency of "inflating the IPO application numbers to give an impression of high amount of subscriptions", Buch said, adding that Sebi has data and evidence on this.

Madhabi Puri Buch *PHOTO: PTI*

- Buch said SEBI also has data and evidence on "mule accounts", wherein the credentials of an innocent person are used to typically front-run on stocks by those wanting to not leave a trace of trades

"We are also seeing practices where there is a pattern of which kind of merchant bankers tend to be ... frequent names occurring in such malpractices. Therefore, in the interest of the investors, we will be required to both review policy as well as (start) enforcement actions," Buch said.

It can be noted that the comments come amid a huge surge in IPO activity, wherein many companies have witnessed very high investor demand in the run-up to the listing.

The high interest typically leads to a company listing at a premium to the offer price. *—PTI*

GOOD TIMES AHEAD

Wheat production likely to be good this year, says Agriculture Minister

NEW DELHI, 19 JAN

Country's wheat production is expected to be good this year amid higher coverage, according to Agriculture Minister Arjun Munda.

The sowing of wheat, the main rabi (winter) crop, that began in October has been completed. Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Punjab are the top three states having the maximum area under wheat coverage.

"As per the sowing data, wheat has been covered in more area and we expect good production this year," Munda said.

As per the ministry's data, the total acreage under the wheat crop remained higher at 336.96 lakh hectares till the last week of the current rabi season of the 2023-24 crop year (July-June), as against 335.67 lakh hectares in the year-ago period.

On 3 January, Food Corporation of India Chairman and Managing Director Ashok K Meena indicated that the country could achieve a new record in wheat production at 114 million tonnes in the ongoing 2023-24 crop year provided weather conditions remain normal.

Wheat production stood at a record 110.55 million tonnes in the 2022-23 crop year, compared to 107.7 million tonnes achieved in the preceding year.

Agriculture Minister Arjun Munda *PHOTO: PTI*

- Wheat production stood at a record 110.55 million tonnes in the 2022-23 crop year, compared to 107.7 million tonnes achieved in the preceding year

Sharing about wheat crop prospects this year, a senior agriculture ministry official said the crop is in good condition and there are no reports of any damage to the crop till date.

"The current cold weather condition is good for the growth of wheat and other rabi crops," he said.

Climate-resistant seeds have been sown in more than 70 per cent of the total wheat area covered in both Punjab and Haryana this year, he said. *—PTI*

Spotify attacks Apple's 27% levy

STOCKHOLM, 19 JAN

Spotify has launched an outspoken attack on new transaction fees of up to 27 per cent being levied by Apple in the US.

On Wednesday, Apple announced it would permit app developers to sell products in places other than its own store - but only if they still paid commission.

Spotify said that was "outrageous" and accused Apple of "stopping at nothing" to protect its profits. It is urging the British government to prevent similar fees being levied in the UK.

Apple has been approached for comment.

The firm introduced the fees in the US as a result of a long-running legal battle with Fortnite developer Epic Games.

The court found in favour of Apple on multiple issues, but it fell foul of a law by not allowing app developers to tell people about other ways of paying, including through links that bypass Apple's own App Store payment system.

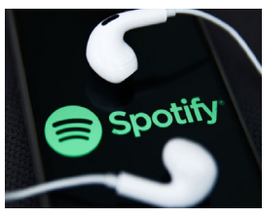


PHOTO: PTI

Apple charges the biggest developers a 30 per cent fee to use this system, though smaller developers pay around 15 per cent , and 85 per cent of developers don't pay a fee at all.

As a result of the ruling, Apple has introduced a new set of rules in the US which will allow people to subscribe to services without using its system, but it will charge developers up to a 27 per cent commission to do so.

According to court documents filed by the firm, it said the commission charge was compliant with the court ruling, adding that App Store developers benefit from Apple's services. *—BBC News*

India needs over 2.5K new aircraft by 2042: Boeing

HYDERABAD, 19 JAN

Backed by high traffic growth, India will need more than 2,500 new aircraft deliveries by 2042, Darren Hulst, Boeing vice-president of Commercial Marketing said on Friday.

Addressing a press conference, Hulst said to meet rising passenger and cargo demand, South Asian carriers are projected to quadruple the size of their fleets over the next two decades and they will require more than 2,705 new airplanes to address growth and fleet replacement.

"Over 92 per cent of that (2,705) or over 2,500 (aircraft India will need) by 2042. It is based on the (forecast given in) middle of the last year," he told reporters.

"We project that carriers here (South Asia including India) will need more than 2,700 aircraft deliveries by the year 2042," he said, adding a similar composition of the fleet with more than 2,300 single aisle, nearly 400 wide body aircraft for long haul.India is the only large economy, a large market in Asia that has evolved to pre-pandemic levels both domestically and internationally in terms of demand. It reflects how important air travel is in the marketplace, also the strength of the Indian economy and how connected a traveller is to continued growth, He said it is expected the India cargo fleet will go 80 airplanes over next 20 years asserting that a massive untapped potential with only 15 freighter aircraft now. *—PTI*

India evolved to pre-pandemic levels both domestically and internationally in terms of demand *PHOTO: PTI*

- Hulst said to meet rising passenger and cargo demand, South Asian carriers are projected to quadruple the size of their fleets over the next two decades and will require more than 2,705 new airplanes to address growth and fleet replacement

Tata Steel to axe more than 2,800 jobs in UK

LONDON, 19 JAN

More than 2,800 jobs will be axed as Tata Steel plans to close its blast furnaces at the Port Talbot plant in South Wales in the UK.

Of the total job cuts, 2,500 will be in the next 18 months, said Indian conglomerate Tata. A further 300 jobs are to go in three years.

Statutory consultation on the cuts will begin, Tata Steel said but did not specify when.

Voluntary redundancies will be sought and more than 130 million pounds will be committed to a support package for affected employees.

It comes as Tata Steel announced it was to press ahead with plans to close blast furnaces at the Port Talbot plant in South Wales.

The first blast furnace will be closing around mid-2024 and the remaining heavy end assets will wind down during the second half of the year, Tata Steel said on Friday.

Job cuts had been expected as part of the deal though 5,000 UK staff are due to remain within the wider UK operations following the agreement with the government.

- The redundancies, to be completed by March next year, will see three-quarters of the 4,000 staff on site put out of work

The redundancies, to be completed by March next year, will see three-quarters of the 4,000 staff on site put out of work.

The Port Talbot workforce currently accounts for 12 per cent of the coastal town's entire population and many had expressed concerns for their families' futures when it emerged that big job losses were expected.

Stephen Kinnock, Labour MP for Aberavon, home of the Port Talbot plant, told Sky News: "Steel is the beating heart of manufacturing and of our entire infrastructure and, of course, of our national security. *—PTI*

LEADERS AT WEF

Global economy, trade yet far from normal

DAVOS, 19 JAN

As the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting drew to a close, global leaders on Friday said the economy and trade appeared to be moving towards normalisation but were yet expected to be far from normal.

WTO Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala said the global trade was weak in 2023 before seeing an uptick in the last quarter.

"We have been more optimistic about 2024, and I feel, we are moving towards normalisation, but I still don't see it returning to a normal fully," she said at a panel discussion on 'The global economic outlook' on the last day of the WEF Annual Meeting 2024 here.

"There are so many uncertainties, and there also so many elections around the world, making it difficult to predict anything," she added.

The WTO chief said she would still expect trade growth to be better than in 2024 unless a major war breaks out.

PHOTO: ANI

She said there are some bright shoots on the trade front, and the trade has been the force for resilience.WTO Chief also said it is politically difficult to raise taxes and politically difficult to phase out or divert subsidies, but we need to take hard decisions. The problem is that the politicians look at the short term.

European Central Bank Chief Christine Lagarde said, "Normalisation was something we began seeing by the end of 2023, but tailwinds that were there started fading, and we are now looking at something that is non-normal".

Singapore President Tharman Shanmugaratnam said, "We know what's happening in the ageing of society, in ecological balance and on so many other words. And I'm not even talking about wars, these stupid wars". *—PTI*

Reliance net profit rises 9% in Oct-Dec qtr

NEW DELHI, 19 JAN

Reliance Industries Ltd on Friday reported a 9 per cent rise in its December quarter net profit as a planned maintenance-induced weakness in oil business earnings was offset by stability in retail and telecom verticals.Net profit of Rs 17,265 crore, or Rs 25.52 per share, in October-December - the third quarter of the current 2023-24 fiscal - was 9.3 per cent higher than Rs 15,792 crore, or Rs 23.19 a share, earning a year back, according to a company's stock exchange filing.Revenue from operations was almost flat at Rs 2.2 lakh crore. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

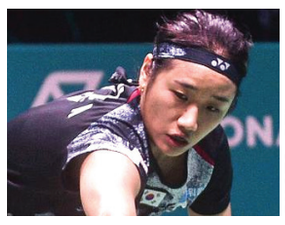


PHOTO: PTI

An Se Young out of India Open after knee injury

NEW DELHI, 19 JAN

World No. 1 and defending champion An Se Young of Korea retired hurt against Singapore's Jia Min Yeo after aggravating her knee injury during a women's singles quarterfinal match at India Open Super 750 badminton tournament here on Friday.The 21-year-old Young, who had hurt her knee during the Asian Games last October, was trailing 19-21 when she decided to throw in the towel.The world No. 20 Singaporean thus recorded only her second win against Young, who had made a good start to the season with a title-winning run at the Malaysia Open Super 1000 last week."I knew the injury could get worse but I wanted to play more matches ahead of the Olympics," she said.—*PTI*

NZ beat Italy 3-1 to finish 5th in FIH

RANCHI, 19 JAN

A dominant New Zealand scored three goals in the first three quarters to get past Italy 3-1 and finish fifth in the FIH Women's Olympic Qualifier here on Friday.Rose Tynan (7th minute) skipper Olivia Merry (10th) and Hannah Cotter (31st) were the scorers for the 'Black Sticks Women' in the fifth-sixth place classification match. Italy's lone goal came from the stick of Ivanna Pessina in the 21st minute from a penalty corner.As expected, the Black Sticks started the match on an offensive note, putting pressure on the Italian defense from the word go.New Zealand secured their first penalty corner in the third minute, only to be denied by a goalline save from the Italian defense.—*PTI*

PHOTO: AP

Avani finishes 11th at Australian Amateurs Golf

NEW DELHI, 19 JAN

Indian golfer Avani Prashanth continued her impressive run in the Australian Amateur Championship by carding an even-par 73 at the Yarra Yarra Golf Club in Melbourne to end tied 11th in the prestigious tournament.The reigning Queen Sirikit Cup champion had finished runner-up in the Australian Master of the Amateurs event the previous week.After finishing creditably tied for 11th in Melbourne, Avani said, "I had 2 good weeks in Australia. I have improved my finish and my scoring. I think my ability to bounce back from adversity has become much better, I was 5 over, with 2 double bogeys yesterday after 9 holes, yet finished 2 over. —*PTI*

Arthur, Bradburn, and Puttick resign from PCB

KARACHI, 19 JAN

The Pakistan Cricket Board has confirmed that foreign coaches Mickey Arthur, Grant Bradburn, and Andrew Puttick have resigned from their respective roles with the national team as well as with the board.The development came after the trio were assigned duties at the National Cricket Academy (NCA) in Lahore following a change in their portfolios post the 50-overs World Cup in India.All three, along with bowling coach Morne Morkel, comprised the main support staff of the Pakistan team until the World Cup.Morkel was the only one to resign immediately after the World Cup from his incomplete contract.—*AP*

India looks for a winning start in the U-19 WC vs B'desh

The event was moved from SL to SA in a late adjustment by the ICC

BLOEMFONTEIN, 19 JAN

The most successful team in the Under-19 World Cup history, defending champions India will embark on a quest to add another trophy to their collection when a fresh bunch led by Uday Saharan takes on Bangladesh in their tournament-opener here on Saturday.

Placed in Group A, the five-time winners will begin their campaign against the Asian rivals here at the Manguang Oval before they head into the other group fixtures against Ireland and the USA.

Having won their first trophy in 2002 under Mohammad Kaif, Indian teams have since gone on to win the U-19 World Cup in 2008, 2012, 2018, and 2022.

The event, which was moved from Sri Lanka to South Africa in a late adjustment by the ICC, features four groups of as many teams each.

The top three teams in each group will qualify for the Super Sixes, followed by the semifinals on February 6 and 8 with the final to be played at Benoni on February 11.

With prodigious talent in Maharashtra all-rounder Arshin Kulkarni, wicket-keeper-batter Aravelly Avanish, left-arm spinner and vice-captain Saumy Kumar Pandey and Saharan, India will feel they have adequate arsenal to go the distance.

Among these players, Kulkarni (Lucknow Supergiants) and Avinash (Chennai Super Kings) have already landed IPL deals and will be keen to make their mark on the biggest stage before they graduate to top-flight cricket.

Saharan, who hails from Rajasthan but has led Punjab across age groups, has scored more than fifty in his last three innings which also includes a century against South Africa.

Last November, the right-handed batter who shifted base from Rajasthan to Punjab, cracked 297 runs in just four matches of the U-19 Challenger Trophy at 99 with four fifties.

Not far behind him was Mumbai's Musheer Khan, another promising talent in this Indian side who raked up 268 runs at 89.33 with one century and two fifties in the domestic tournament.

Among bowlers, Aaradhya Shukla, Pandey, and Kulkarni were among the top wicket-takers in the U-19 Challenger Trophy before the Indian team made its way to South Africa.

The team's form also favours India with this bunch winning each of their four matches in the U-19 tri-nation series in South Africa. The final against the hosts was washed out.

But India will also guard against complacency against Bangladesh having lost the U-19 Asia Cup semifinal in a largely one-sided contest in December. Bangladesh defeated Australia in its final warm-up game.

—*PTI*

India captain Uday Saharan (right) and Bangladesh skipper Mahfuzur Rahman Rabby ahead of their U-19. The match is slated for 1:30 pm IST PHOTO: ICC

New Zealand beat Pakistan by seven wickets in the 4th T20I in Christchurch as Mitchell won Player of the Match PHOTO: AP

Mitchell, Phillips' 139-run stand gets NZ 4-0 up

CHRISTCHURCH, 19 JAN

New Zealand continued their rampant run in the T20I series against Pakistan, securing another emphatic win in the 4th T20I at Christchurch.

New Zealand's stand-in skipper Mitchell Santner won the toss and opted to field first. Mohammad Rizwan's unbeaten 90-run knock paved the way for Pakistan to post 158/5 on the board in 20 overs on a tricky wicket.

The Kiwis lost three wickets in quick succession but Glenn Phillips and Daryl Mitchell slammed an unbeaten stand of 139 runs for the 4th wicket to put their team 4-0 up.

Slamming the move of breaking the worldwide famous opening pair of Babar Azam and Mohammed Rizwan following the team's loss in the T20I series against New Zealand, former Pakistan cricketer and Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) Ramiz Raja asked the selectors what benefit they gained out of it. In the ongoing T20I series against the Kiwis, Pakistan is trailing 3-0, with two games to go. In the series, Pakistan has been opening with new openers, Saim Ayub and Mohammad Rizwan, who have underperformed as a pair in this series so far.

On his YouTube Channel, Raja voiced out, "So much pressure was created to break the opening pair of Babar and Rizwan. After breaking the opening partnership, which was evaluated based on the strike rate. When you bring in new players, they may perform well in leagues, but international cricket is a different beast where there is pressure, and the focus of the entire world is on you. You broke the opening pair that was famous worldwide."

"Either you have a workshop of trained openers behind you who are gradually being introduced when you have no other options. It takes time to form an opening pair. It is not an easy task. So, if you have a pair, and they consistently kept you in the field during matches, what benefit did you get after breaking it?" he added.

He also said that he backs every skipper, including the current T20I skipper Shaheen Shah Afridi.

—*AP*

Gukesh outwits Ian; Pragnanandhaa holds leader Giri

WIJK AAN ZEE, 19 JAN

Indian Grandmaster D Gukesh produced a fine effort to outwit World Championship challenger Ian Nepomniachtchi of Russia in the fifth round of the Tata Steel Masters chess tournament here on Friday.

With his second victory in the tournament, Gukesh now has 2.5 points from five rounds after he made an indifferent start to the event, losing two matches in the first four rounds. Grandmaster R Pragnanandhaa held tournament leader and defending champion Anish Giri of Holland to a draw on the day.

GM Vidit Gujrathi played out his fifth draw on the trot, signing a peace pact with local hopeful Max Warderman.

With eight rounds remaining in one of the strongest traditional events, Giri maintained his sole lead on four points out of a possible five.

Praggnanandhaa, Firouza Alireza of France, and Nodirbek Abdusattarov of Uzbekistan share the second spot with four points while Gujrathi and Gukesh are next in the standings on 2.5, sharing it with three others.

In one the biggest upsets of the event so far, Women's world champion Ju Wnejun of China defeated Alireza in a finely crafted game.

Earlier, Gukesh was a class act in a Queen's gambit declined with white pieces against Nepomniachtchi. The Indian won a pawn in the ensuing middle game but Nepomniachtchi had his share of counterplay till he fell for a tactical shot that cost him another pawn.

Soon it was a Queen and minor piece endgame on the board and Gukesh wrapped it up quickly.

Praggnanandhaa did not have to exert much against Giri with white pieces.

Playing a lesser-known opening setup the Indian found Giri adequately prepared and the pieces got traded in a heap in the ensuing middle game.

The players arrived at a Knight and Pawns endgame wherein the draw was the only possible result.

—*PTI*

Pragnanandhaa PHOTO:X

D Gukesh PHOTO: X

Prannoy makes first s/f at India Open

NEW DELHI, 19 JAN

India's HS Prannoy produced a valiant effort to progress to the men's singles semifinals with a thrilling three-game win over Chinese Taipei's Wang Tzu Wei at the India Open Super 750 badminton tournament here on Friday.

The 31-year-old, who had won the bronze medal at the Asian Games and World Championships last year, recovered from a slump in the second game and showed nerves of steel in the decider to eke out a 21-11 17-21 21-18 win over world number 28 Wang in a 77-minute match.

It is his first semifinal of the India Open.

Coming into the match with a 5-3 head-to-head count, Prannoy dished out an attacking game and constructed his rallies well, keeping his opponent to the back and often finishing points with steep smashes. One such smash took him to 11-4 at the interval.

Trailing 4-13, Wang showed sparks of his attacking game by winning a point after troubling Prannoy with a barrage of returns. A lovely cross-court net shot followed by a smash gave Prannoy an 18-5 lead but he missed the lines thrice to lose the next four points.

Wang suddenly looked in control as he reached double digits with a net kill and then unleashed a smash to take his sixth point on the trot. A lucky net chord and then a net error from Wang gave the Indian nine-game point opportunities and he sealed it with a backhand return to take the opening game.

After the change of sides, Wang engaged Prannoy in attacking rallies as he stepped up the pace a bit. The Indian missed a few points after failing in his execution as Wang moved to 9-6 before taking a healthy five-point lead.

—*PTI*

India fail to qualify for Paris Olympics

RANCHI, 19 JAN

The Indian women's hockey team failed to qualify for the Paris Olympics after going down 0-1 to Japan in the third-fourth place match of the FIH Olympic Qualifier here on Friday.

Kana Urata scored for Japan off a penalty corner in the first quarter and they kept the lead intact till the end of the match while Indians failed to find the target.

India was left with no choice but to win this game after suffering a 3-4 defeat in the shootout to Germany on Thursday.

But a bigger heartbreak awaited the home team as it lost and failed to book a ticket to Paris after a historic fourth-place finish at the Tokyo Games in 2021.

— *PTI*

Australia crush West Indies by 10 wickets

ADELAIDE, 19 JAN

Australia wrapped up a 10-wicket victory before lunch on the third day in Adelaide as Josh Hazlewood claimed career-best match figures, but there was late drama when Shamar Joseph drew blood from Usman Khawaja with a bouncer when the scores were level, forcing him to retire hurt.Shamar Joseph again showed his batting prowess at No. 11, which will surely mean a promotion shortly, as he and Kemar Roach added 26 for the last wicket to follow the 55 they put on in the first innings.It meant a brief second innings for Khawaja and Steven Smith. Oddly, Shamar Joseph, who claimed Smith with his first ball in Test cricket, was not given the new ball. Australia 283 (Head 119, S Joseph 5-94) and 26 for 0 beat West Indies 188 (McKenzie 50, Cummins 4-41, Hazlewood 4-44) and 120 (Hazlewood 5-35) by 10 wickets. —*AP*

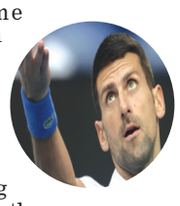
Djokovic, Sabalenka and Coco Gauff advance into fourth round

MELBOURNE, 19 JAN

Novak Djokovic was back to his ominous best Friday with a straight-sets romp into the Australian Open last 16 as Aryna Sabalenka and Jannik Sinner emphatically stated their title credentials.

US Open champion Coco Gauff also signaled her intent in a 6-0, 6-2 drubbing while 16-year-old Mirra Andreeva kept her dream run going with a fightback against France's Diane Parry.

Another young Russian, qualifier Maria Timofeeva, joined them in the fourth round by upsetting 10th seed Beatriz Haddad Maia and in doing so became the lowest-ranked woman since 2017, at 170, to get so far at Melbourne Park.



Ten-time champion Djokovic has not been at his best until now, dropping sets in both of his opening matches, admitting he was feeling under the weather.

But the Serbian superstar's bid for a record-breaking 25th Grand Slam crown got firmly back on track against 30th seed Argentine Tomas Martin Etcheverry with a routine 6-3, 6-3, 7-6 (7/2) win on Rod Laver Arena.

—*AP*

India needs 'improvements' Stimac after defeat to Uzbekistan

DOHA, 19 JAN

India coach Igor Stimac said his team offered Uzbekistan too much space and time during the 0-3 drubbing in the AFC Asian Cup here and admitted drastic improvement is required to match the standards of the continent's elites.

Unlike their outing against Australia, when they managed to hold the title contenders and World Cup regulars goalless for the first 50 minutes, the Indian defense was split wide open in the early part of the game by Uzbekistan.

Defensive lapses hurt the 102-ranked team the most, as it conceded two goals within the first 17 minutes.

Igor Stimac PHOTO:PTI

"They were far more clinical than us. They didn't give away anything. And whatever problems we had, came from ourselves. We allowed them to take those chances. That's the difference," Stimac said after the match.

India simply failed to withstand the early Uzbek onslaught though Stimac preferred to go easy on his wards, who will face Syria on January 23 in their last group match.

"Overall, the boys have been fantastic. They have trained well and maintained discipline. But at this level, there's never a convenient time to concede goals. If you allow time and space to a side like Uzbekistan, they will kill you," said Stimac.

"We need to work on ourselves, close these gaps in our game, and look forward to winning the crucial matches that lie ahead of us." Nearly 40,000 fans had turned up at the Ahmed bin Ali Stadium in Doha on Thursday, most of them Indians.

—*PTI*

AUSTRALIAN OPEN MEN'S DOUBLES

Bopanna-Ebden pair advances to third round

MELBOURNE, 19 JAN

Second-seeded Indo-Australian pair of Rohan Bopanna and Matthew Ebden barely broke a sweat in a straight-set victory over local hopes John Millman and Edward Winter to enter the men's doubles third round of the Australian Open here on Friday.

Bopanna and Ebden strolled past the wildcards 6-2 6-4 in a second-round match at Court 3 that lasted a little over one hour.

The 43-year-old Bopanna and Ebden dominated their rivals in all areas. They won 80 percent of the first serve against 68 percent by Millman and Winter.

The duo also recorded the fastest serve of the match – 203 kmph, and they also nailed 17 winners against their opponents' 11.

In the first-round match on Thursday, Bopanna and Ebden, the 2023 US Open finalists, had beaten another Australian pair of James Duckworth and Marc Polmans 7-6 (7), 6-4, 7-6 (10).

In the third round, Bopanna and Ebden will face 14th 14th-seeded Dutch-Croatian team of Wesley Koolhof and Nikola Mektic. Earlier, another Indian, Sriram Balaji, entered the second round of the Australian Open men's doubles in the company of his Romanian partner Victor Cornea.

The Balaji-Corena duo defeated the Italian duo of Matteo Arnaldi and Andrea Pellegrino 6-3, 6-4 in the first round.

India's **N Sriram Balaji** and his Romanian partner Victor Vlad Cornea entered the second round of the men's doubles at the Australian Open here on Friday.

They defeated the Italian duo of Matteo Arnaldi and Andrea Pellegrino 6-3, 6-4 in the first round.

In the next round, the Indo-Romanian pair will take on 10th seed Marcelo Arevalo of El Salvador and Mate Pavic of Croatia.

The Balaji-Cornea team came in as an alternate pair into the competition. While the Indian is ranked 79th in ATP doubles ranking, the Romanian is ranked 69th.

It is only the second time that Balaji has made it to the second round of the Australian Open, having done so last year with fellow Indian Jeevan Nedunchezhiyan. —*AP*

Rohan Bopanna and Matthew Ebden PHOTO: TWITTER